

COMMISSION ON CHILD PROTECTION

REPORT

Office of Governor Tony Knowles

October 1, 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	5
COMMON ELEMENTS	8
ENHANCEMENTS	10
PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS and SERVICES NEEDED	15
MEASUREMENT OF PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY	26
COORDINATION	28
COMMISSION MEMBERS	30
MEETING SCHEDULE	31
APPENDIX A	32
APPENDIX B	35
APPENDIX C	50
APPENDIX D	86

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On August 12, 2002, Governor Knowles created the Commission on Child Protection to assess the progress made over the last five years and identify next steps for improvement of the child protection system. The commission met seven times over the next six weeks, receiving verbal testimony and written information from a wide variety of sources. The commission reached several conclusions and made a number of recommendations. Among these were:

The state has made substantial progress toward increasing the safety and permanence of Alaska's children through clearer statutes that set time frames based on the child's needs and a concerted effort to enable permanent placement for children who have been in the system too long.

The state has developed a solid working relationship with Tribes and Tribal organizations which has improved the capacity of both partners to provide appropriately for at risk Alaska Native children and their families.

It is essential to maintain the current level of funding and the range of services being provided to children and their families while also making substantial new investment in the child protection system. Unless this investment is made, the State of Alaska will not be able to meet child protection standards established by the federal government.

For social workers to be most successful with the children and families they serve, DFYS must reduce their caseloads by increasing the number of professional and paraprofessional workers.

At the same time, the State must significantly increase services to heal families so that they will be available when the family is ready to participate. Alaska can reduce the risk to children if these services are provided in a way that increases the families' capacity to cope with their problems. In particular, these services must help people deal with substance abuse and mental health issues.

DFYS must develop and implement a comprehensive quality assurance program that ensures client and stakeholder participation in identifying areas needing improvement and making recommendations for ways to achieve improvements that will better protect the safety of each child.

Complete implementation of a new statewide automated child welfare information system (ORCA) is essential to provide the information workers need to make sound case decisions about children and their families. This system will also provide the data necessary to assess DFYS' performance in any aspect of services provided, thereby

supporting the quality assurance process as well. The system should, to the extent possible, be integrated with other state and Tribal child protection related data management systems.

State agencies involved in the child protection system should continue to coordinate their work. This should be achieved by the commitment of commissioners and senior managers to work together to reduce barriers to effective service to children at risk for child abuse and neglect and their families.

INTRODUCTION

Governor Knowles created the Commission on Child Protection to continue his administration's commitment to protecting those Alaskan children who are at risk, in peril and victims of a hidden war. The commission's recommendations will identify the next steps for improvement of the child protection system, and will influence the transition reports prepared for the next administration and shape the political discourse on this issue.

The "Smart Start" initiative and other efforts over the last five years have made progress in improving the State of Alaska's response to child abuse and neglect:

- The number of adoptions increased 46 percent in federal fiscal year 2000 and 37 percent in federal fiscal year 2001.
- Because the Balloon Project has been successful at moving children who had been in foster care the longest into permanent placements, expenditures for foster care have declined by 6.2 percent in state fiscal year 2001 and 4.5 percent in fiscal year 2002.
- The assignment of reports of harm for investigation has improved from 77 percent in state fiscal year 1998 to 91 percent in fiscal year 2001, with some areas of the state reaching 100 percent.

These results show the benefit of funding new social worker positions and additional resources for the partner agencies in the child protection system. In addition, the child protection statutes have been tightened to make the system move faster to help children. More than 25,000 children have had access to better health care through the Denali KidCare health insurance program. It is important to note that all these improvements have to be maintained. New resources are needed to implement the new initiatives recommended by the commission. Reallocation of existing resources would undermine progress made so far.

Despite these recent efforts, children continue to experience harm and neglect from their parents:

- In fiscal year 2001, the Division of Family and Youth Services received 17,457 reports of harm regarding 13,857 children. Of these reports, 16,086 were within the division's authority to investigate.

As of September 3, 2002, the division had 2,209 children in custody, with 1,893 placed outside their homes.

Around 1,300 children enter the division's custody each year.

A disproportionate number of Alaska Native or American Indian children are in custody. As of the time of this report, 59.1 percent of all children in custody and 60.4 percent of the children placed outside their homes are Alaska Native or American Indian.

Alcohol and drug abuse are critical issues for the families of many of the children in custody, yet not all communities have treatment resources. Even where there are treatment programs, people wanting treatment often must wait for months to enter a program. The rural areas of Alaska have the fewest treatment resources available, of any type, which means parents and children often have to leave their communities to participate in the services they need for safe reunification.

Once a child is removed from his family, quality foster care is critical for the well being of the child. Alaska needs to generate a significantly larger pool of foster families to provide more options for appropriate placement and to relieve the strain on existing foster families.

Clearly, helping these children and their families presents a complex challenge, and one that is not likely to be easily or quickly resolved. Equally clearly, the problem will only get worse unless the people of the state of Alaska commit themselves to addressing the issues, beginning in their home communities and demanding that their elected leaders invest adequately in a broad spectrum of prevention services and response capabilities.

At times, in the urgent effort to respond appropriately to the aftermath of child abuse and neglect, Alaska's leaders have lost sight of the advantage to be gained from preventing child abuse and neglect. Though prevention must occur at the local level, the state must provide support and resources to strengthen those local efforts.

If abuse or neglect has occurred, no change is likely without adequate intervention and treatment resources. No one agency or court, and no one jurisdiction, has authority over all these issues.

Given the high number of Alaska Native children in the system, and the additional children being protected under the jurisdiction of the Tribes, state agencies must actively partner with Tribal governments to address the needs of Alaska Native families in distress. In addition, collaboration among government agencies, community and faith-based organizations, the private sector and concerned individuals is the only hope for expanding the support network sufficiently to meet the demand for services.

The commission intends that its work reinforce the long-term commitment of Alaska's energies to protection of our children, by focusing the attention of the highest levels of state government and demanding a stronger commitment of resources by the legislature to meet this continuing challenge.

The Commission expresses its appreciation for the support it received from DFYS. Division employees who testified before the commission and worked with it were obviously dedicated to protecting Alaska's children and were committed to self assessment that could lead to improvement in their work. Alaskans and community organizations should support these workers who daily face daunting work loads and extraordinary emotional situations.

COMMON ELEMENTS

Duties of the Commission No. 1: Provide a review of recent reports and findings related to the child protection system including review of at least the following: Child Protection Review Team Report to Governor Knowles (December 1997); various performance reviews of the Division of Family and Youth Services by the Alaska State Legislature's Division of Legislative Audit; and the findings of the Alaska Child and Family Services Review of the child and family services programs under federal law.

The Commission on Child Protection has reviewed the 1997 *Child Protection Review Team Report to Governor Knowles*; *Report by the Review Panel*, a study of five cases led by the Kempe Children's Center, Denver (1997); four reports of the Division of Legislative Audit; and the *Alaska Child and Family Services Review* (CFSR or "federal review"). The commission discussed the 1997 recommendations with the co-chair of the Child Protection Review Team, Deputy Commissioner Russ Webb of the Department of Health and Social Services, and discussed the legislative audits with the lead auditors. The lead reviewer for the *Alaska Child and Family Services Review* gave a presentation to the commission and responded to questions.

The commissioners received testimony from people responsible for determining the direction of child protection in Alaska and from people who go to work each day to try to help abused and neglected children. The director of the Division of Family and Youth Services, the division's four regional managers, and the people responsible for the division's fiscal matters, management information system, programs and field operations all testified. Individual child protection workers spoke before the commission, as did social service workers from Tribal organizations. The commission heard from grandparents and parents and from youths in foster care. Foster parents and adoptive parents offered their insights. More than 50 people spoke to the commission at a public hearing on September 6, 2002. Almost that many sent in written testimony. The testimony came from rural and urban voices although the meetings occurred in Anchorage.

Partners in the child protection system gave presentations about their responsibilities and views of the safety and well being of Alaska's children. The commission heard from the Office of Public Advocacy, the Public Defender Agency, the Department of Law, the Tribal/State Collaboration Group, the Alaska State Troopers, the Department of Corrections, and the Anchorage Police Department. The director of the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities spoke to the commission, as did the director of the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the director of an alcohol treatment program that receives state funding. The commission heard about the Children's Trust and the Alaska State Court System. With the court system's Court Improvement Project members, the commission listened to a presentation on and asked

questions about the Alaska Child and Family Services Review, presented by the Alaska review lead, from Region X of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

It was evident from the reports and testimony that those who wrote and those who testified were concerned about the welfare of Alaska's children and families. That concern was the fundamental common element of all the reports and testimony.

The reports clearly identified other recurring issues that have not yet been resolved:

In FY 1997, 3,740 reports of harm within DFYS' investigative authority (26 percent) were not investigated. In FY 2001, nine percent were not investigated. All reports of harm need to be investigated and appropriate services provided to resolve family problems early and prevent repeat maltreatment and removal of children from the home.

More social workers are needed to reduce workloads to a manageable level, where consistent attention to children and parents will improve working relationships and better outcomes for children.

Foster and adoptive parents are often the strongest agent of change for children, yet there are not enough homes available. To give children a larger pool of placement alternatives, better foster parent recruitment, retention, and involvement in case planning is necessary.

Better coordination between DFYS and law enforcement is essential to keep children safe from serious injury and repeat maltreatment.

Most cases involve people who need substance abuse or mental health treatment, which is not readily available in all communities or even regions of the state. Extensive wait lists exist for the available services.

Children in out-of-home care need more opportunities to visit with their parents, siblings, and extended family if they are going to maintain healthy connections that will support reunification. The tension in the system between reunification and permanence sometimes leaves the child in limbo.

Other agencies in the child protection and court systems can become bottlenecks to timely resolution of cases, when they lack sufficient staff to fulfill their roles.

The state needs to continue to integrate its child protection services with the tribes' child protection programs.

ENHANCEMENTS

Duties of the Commission No. 2: Provide an assessment of the impact of recent enhancements to the child protective services systems including at least the following: the Balloon Project; state/tribal collaborative efforts; the health passport program; and the training academy.

Alaska's child protection system experienced enormous changes in the last five years, marking an historical landmark for progress in improving the child protection system. It started with embracing the challenges inherent in a system whose mission is always controversial and difficult to fulfill.

An intense focus and commitment led to a number of enhancements to the system, including revising statutes, putting every child's safety first, moving children more quickly to permanent homes, and assuring the best possible practice for making well-coordinated decisions regarding children and their families.

Retaining funding for these enhancements is imperative to avoid losing ground in the child protection arena. Several of these initiatives are funded with federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant revenue, including the Balloon Project, the new front line DFYS social workers, and Healthy Families Home visitation all discussed below. Other programs also funded with these TANF funds, child care for low income families, Headstart, and the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, while not direct participants in the child protection system, serve as important child abuse and neglect prevention programs. There will be at least a \$12 million shortfall in these federal funds in fiscal year 2004. This shortage will continue to grow in subsequent years. Unless the state appropriates replacement funds, new programs that have benefited children at risk will end. If replacement funds are not found, the loss of these important child protection programs would have a severe negative impact on the child protection system's newly gained ability to respond to more reports of harm and more quickly move to implement permanency in children's lives.

STRONGER STATUTES

A complete rewrite of Alaska's child protection statutes occurred in 1998 representing a major shift in policy and practice. The child's safety became the paramount concern. The law governing intervention between a child and his parents was re-adjusted, to make it clear that the state may intervene when there is a risk to the child, before the child is actually injured. The **new statutes** also set timelines to move children through foster care to permanence, through reunification with their families or adoption. Shorter time frames were instituted for remedying problems that brought the family to the attention of the child protection system.

IMPROVED SAFETY

Additional **child protection workers** were funded in 1999. Prior to this time, many reports of harm regarding children's safety did not receive intervention because there was a lack of workers and time available to check every one of them. A **dual track** program was piloted in the Mat Su Valley, and then later expanded to Anchorage and Nome, which contracted with community agencies to help respond to reports on children with lower risk levels. Together, more workers and implementation of dual track have led to responding to more of the reports of harm to children.

Alaska opened **child advocacy centers** as a way to improve the quality of the investigation decisions and treatment of child victims. Six communities now have centers that provide child-friendly settings that are neutral and bring in both the criminal and civil sides for the best coordination possible. Additionally, all Division of Family and Youth Services (DFYS) workers are required to complete a training course on **forensic interviewing** with their local law enforcement officers.

Giving DFYS real time access to state criminal records, **Alaska Public Safety Information Network**, has allowed placement decisions to better consider safety issues before and after placing children in homes.

Sharpening skills for determining risk and safety of children is never complete. The division had been using an outdated methodology to assess risk, so through a contractor a new risk assessment tool has been developed and all workers were trained as of December 2001. The new tool, **Structured Decision Making** (SDM), is helping identify risk and safety factors more consistently and reliably than in the past. The new tool is used throughout the life of a case, from the first intake call to case closure. Over the first year of use, the tool is being validated and refined.

MOVED TO PERMANENCY QUICKER

At the time the new child protection law was passed, there were over six hundred children who had been in custody well beyond the timeframes of the new statute. The **Balloon Project** was funded to focus on children who had been in custody the longest, and in a coordinated effort with other system partner agencies, gave them the attention they deserved and made permanent placements possible. The project continues to identify and work on permanency for the children who have been in the system longest. As of August 2002, over 1,900 Alaska children have been included in the project. Since its inception in 1998, 1,433 children in the Balloon Project have had their permanent plans finalized. Thirty-five percent of these children were reunified with their parents. Thirty-seven percent were adopted, and 15 percent placed in guardianships. Ten percent

aged out of the system or were emancipated from their parents. For 5 percent of the children, a compelling reason not to terminate parental rights was identified; long-term foster care was determined to be in their best interest.

While the Balloon Project focused on moving children to a permanent home, **Project Succeed** brought community agencies and Tribes in to recruit adoptive homes, conduct home studies, and provide transition services, and post adoption and guardianship support beginning in 1997. Since 2000, the Home Study Writing Project has also helped move children to permanency quicker by relying on a number of community professionals to complete adoptive home studies. In 2001, Alaska initiated its first ever **independent living program** for youth exiting foster care to be on their own.

There were other improvements that continued the focus on permanency. For example the child and family **visitation center** in Anchorage, opened in 2002, provides a model to allow more frequent visits between parents and children separated from each other, which leads to greater chances of reunification. This successful model is already at capacity and needs to be expanded. There remains a need for further visitation centers in Anchorage as well as throughout the state. Additionally, DFYS has scheduled **more case conferences** to guarantee that parents understand timeframes and to assure work is being completed on case plans. Effective in 1999, all cases are reviewed every three months during the first year of custody, then every six months thereafter.

STRONGER TRIBAL STATE COLLABORATION

A solid working relationship emerged between the state and Tribes regarding Alaska Native children in state custody. Participation and commitment by senior management of DFYS contributes to the successful relationship. Tribes were essential partners in efforts like Project Succeed and worker training. The division developed **ICWA specialists** in each region and one with statewide coordination responsibilities. Tribes access information from the division easier and are called upon frequently to participate in decisions regarding their children. The **Tribal/State Collaboration Group** has met statewide regularly to discuss problems and create solutions since before 1997.

Federal funds (**Title IV-E**) are passed through to Tribes to build administration and training capacity for village ICWA workers. A **Tribal HELP Desk** in the division's Anchorage office was developed to help workers identify the Tribes of children in state custody in Anchorage and help Tribes locate their children. Work on recognizing **Tribally licensed foster homes** for children in state custody is underway and promises to allow this partnership to continue to grow.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

New programs have been initiated throughout the state to address substance abuse and mental health treatment needs.

In the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region the **People Working Together** project brings culturally based mental health services to severely emotionally disturbed children and their families.

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation and DFYS work together in the **Family Spirit Project** that targets families who are at risk of having a child removed from their home as a result of parental substance abuse. The program combines Western and traditional approaches to treatment. **Rural Family Recovery Camps** are located in rural settings and combine traditional cultural and subsistence practices in treatment. The Norton Sound Health Corporation's **Mobile Adolescent Treatment Team** goes into villages to work with a substance abusing child or youth and his family and community.

The Alaska Court System has instituted specialized courts to deal with substance abusers who are before the courts. In **Therapeutic Court**, the participants are felony driving-while-intoxicated offenders, misdemeanants with alcohol-related offenses, and felons with drug related convictions. Rather than being incarcerated, the offenders receive intensive supervision, treatment, and monitoring. They are required to engage in a long and intensive treatment program. In a new pilot program called the **Family CARE Court**, the participants are parents with substance abuse problems who are at risk of having their children removed or who have had children removed from their homes. Participants receive an assessment and a case manager (funded by the Office of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in the Department of Health and Social Services). They are monitored to promote participation in treatment and continued sobriety, assisted in obtaining a job or attending school, and given recognition for progress and sanctions for non-compliance.

FOCUS ON QUALITY WORKFORCE

Another important partnership developed in the last four years is with the University of Alaska. Workers attend the **Training Academy**, housed at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, School of Social Work, prior to being assigned a caseload. They return for another 24 total training hours during their first year of employment. New supervisors and managers are also required to participate in training. Continuing education and training are available for all levels of employees in the division, and of the Tribes. This combination of trainees brings a cross cultural aspect to the training for everyone. Nevertheless, the more experienced workers do not regularly take advantage of the available training out of concern for their casework duties.

An employee and student **Stipend Program** has been built to improve recruitment and retention of workers. Student practicum units are housed in the Anchorage and Fairbanks offices, with Bethel and Juneau to follow soon. The non-employee students spend an academic year turning the division office into a learning environment. They are provided a small stipend, and in return apply for a job with DFYS after graduation. Employees participating in the stipend program are granted educational leave, provided a stipend while on leave, and in return come back and work two months for every month on leave. In the four years since the program began, forty-eight students have completed degrees.

Professional licensure of social workers became a requirement in 2001. **Mental health clinicians, substance abuse evaluators, and psychiatric nurses** have been added in 2000, in various offices, to help in making the best decisions possible for children and their families.

PREVENTATIVE SERVICES

The **Alaska Children's Trust** was activated in 1996 through an initial legislative appropriation of \$6 million. A seven-member board was appointed to oversee the fund and approve grants for community-initiated projects aimed at the prevention and elimination of child abuse in all its forms. Since its inception, the Trust has provided more than \$1.88 million in grants for 47 projects in rural and urban Alaska.

The Department of Health and Social Services established an **Office of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome** to promote preventative services and diagnosis. This is an important innovation as 60 percent of the children in the subsidized adoption and guardianship programs have prenatal exposure to alcohol and other drugs.

Community based resource centers and **Healthy Families** are other examples of child abuse and neglect prevention programs.

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS and SERVICES NEEDED

Duties of the Commission No. 3: Provide recommendations for elements to be included in the Program Improvement Plan, which is under development in response to the findings of the review under federal law.

Duties of the Commission No. 4: Provide recommendations for additional improvements to systems and services that support the child protection system or support families and children at risk of entering the child protection system, including mental health and substance abuse treatment services.

INTRODUCTION

Services and improvement were themes in the *Alaska Child and Family Review* as well as themes of many of the people who offered testimony before the commission. The addition or expansion of service opportunities for alcohol treatment or meaningful visitation programs is needed to improve the child protection system. But the addition of services alone will not address the problems created when an overloaded service system lacks sufficient staff to meet with clients and to develop and implement individualized case plans. The commission viewed program improvement and the addition of service opportunities as being intertwined.

The Division of Family and Youth Services is in the midst of developing a program improvement plan (PIP) in response to the federal Alaska Child and Family Services Review. The PIP will address the deficiencies noted by the federal reviewers. Some of the Alaska CFSR findings concern the need for services while other findings concern how the state addresses the process of assessment and case planning. The commission report addresses the program improvement plan and additional services jointly, because they are intimately related.

The federal review was not the only source of information that the commission received. The commissioners heard from foster parents, youth who are in foster care, child protection social workers, DFYS regional managers, Tribal organizations, the court system, attorneys who represent parents, guardians ad litem assigned to represent the children, police agencies, parents, grandparents, and other people involved in the child protection system. It was evident that a substantial investment is needed in public and private resources dedicated to child protection in order for Alaska to fully protect its children from harm and neglect.

Although commissioners discussed a need for specialized diagnostic evaluations for children who may be affected by fetal alcohol syndrome, coupled with the need for additional alcohol and drug treatment for women with children, it was clear that

prevention services are needed now to stem the tide of treatment demands downstream. Prevention programs are cost effective and prevent the larger commitment of public and private resources to address the more complex problems presented by long time or intergenerational child abuse and neglect. To support a family through a resource referral when it begins to have problems is cost effective and humane. Although neither the commission nor anyone who presented evidence had a solution to the tragedy of child abuse and neglect, they all appeared to be in agreement that the provision of prevention and treatment services is essential to the safety of our state's children.

GOAL I: ALASKA MUST INTENSIFY ITS FOCUS AND INVESTMENT IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM TO ASSURE THE SAFETY OF ALASKA'S CHILDREN AND TO ASSURE THE TIMELY AND WISE DISPOSITION OF CASES.

The commission has identified the need for additional funding for the child protection system. It is not only federal, state, and Tribal governments who must expend time, energy, and financial resources. The responsibility for child protection is shared by all Alaskans.

This broad goal contains the two essential parts of the child protection system: a child's safety and the integrity of the family. Although they complement each other they also can be in conflict. Alaskans want children to remain in their homes and be reared by their families. Alaskans want children to be safe. When these goals come into conflict, the State of Alaska must assure the safety of the child first and foremost.

The goal of child safety can be addressed through a variety of strategies including prevention services, family support services such as counseling, parenting classes, public health initiatives, or early childhood development programs. Many of these services or programs are not within the purview of DFYS but they all contribute to the well being of children in Alaska. If these services are unavailable, not accepted, or unsuccessful the removal of the child from a dangerous or neglectful situation may be necessary. Until adequate, consistent services become available, there will be a continuing inability to protect the children of our state. It is evident to any organization, business, or governmental agency that if there not enough "servers" their efforts to provide a service will fall short of its goals. For example, if there are not enough airport screening personnel, screening stations, inadequate training, or the personnel are harassed by angry passengers, the airport security system will be less than adequate. Whether the goal is airport security or child protection, the whole system interrelates and goals cannot be met if there are not enough people on the front line. And there will not be enough people on the front line without a commitment by top management and funding agencies to provide for sufficient front line workers.

The front line servers at DFYS are the social workers. They meet the children and families first. The initial contact with DFYS is through reports of harm. When a report is received the social worker assesses the report and assigns it a priority number from one to three depending on his or her determination as to the urgency of the presenting problem.

The CFSR found that DFYS is inconsistent in its efforts to ensure children's protection from abuse or neglect. The CFSR found that the DFYS response to priority one reports was good. However, while work load adjustment (the decision that there is not enough staff time to investigate certain reports) is declining for priority three reports there is need for continued improvement in response to priority two and three reports of harm. Problems with responding to reports in a timely manner were attributed to high workload (approximately twice the recommended standard) and the corresponding problem of high levels of staff turnover. (CFSR, p. 3, Item 1.)

The CFSR also found that the incidence of repeat maltreatment reported to DFYS was unacceptably high. Even if this finding is corrected to allow for problems with report counting procedures, DFYS still does not meet the federal standard. The repeat reports of maltreatment may be once again attributable to high caseloads and lack of services. If DFYS cannot provide sufficient attention and involve parents in supportive programs, the likelihood of repeat maltreatment is high. (CFSR, p. 4, Item 2.)

DFYS was also found to be more successful in its protection efforts when it removed a child from her home rather than leaving the child in the home. Yet, the federal review showed that Alaska lacked adequate or appropriate services and monitoring for families; and when the child was reunited with his or her family, there were inadequate post-reunification services. (CFSR, pp. 4-5, Items 3, 4.)

Recommendation 1: A critical problem is the fact that social workers do not have enough time to meet with clients even one time per month and develop relationships that foster cooperation and success. With present caseloads, social workers cannot respond to all reports of harm. Caseloads are also a key reason for staff turnover. The State of Alaska must require that social worker caseloads not exceed nationally accepted standards and that the caseloads be capped, with expressed support to seek supplemental funds when caseloads rise over the standards.

Recommendation 2: DFYS needs to determine if Tribal workers, support group members, other community organizations, or contractors can assist social workers to meet some of the service requests of clients such as transportation or telephone answering. The division should also consider streamlining work processes to cut down on paperwork.

Excerpted with Permission
Copyright 2002 Anchorage Daily News

September 7, 2002 Saturday, FINAL EDITION, Pg. B1

DFYS worker shares front-line tales
HEARING: Commission on Child Protection hears of stress, huge workloads.

By Lisa Demer
Anchorage Daily News

The caseworker hardly took a breath Friday as she recounted the events that eat up her workday at the Division of Family and Youth Services. It was a stress-filled tale of managing crises, administrative duties and spur-of-the moment conferences with parents.

Jill Roberts, who has worked as a DFYS children's services specialist for nine months, provided Gov. Tony Knowles' Commission on Child Protection with the view from the front lines.

The panel was created in August to recommend changes in Alaska's system of protecting children, just as a series of legislative audits, consultants and an earlier review team have done during the Knowles administration. At least some of the earlier recommendations, such as tougher state laws and funding for additional caseworkers, have been accomplished. A report from the new commission is due by Oct. 1.

Roberts made 8:30 a.m. Tuesday the starting point of her tale. She came in after spending part of the holiday weekend preparing for a trial at which parents could permanently lose their children.

A flurry of news awaited her at the DFYS office downtown. A foster child acting up needed an assessment at North Star Hospital. New concerns had come in about a father on her caseload. Those crises dealt with, Roberts went on to a two-hour meeting regarding the upcoming trial. She checked her voice mail, which was full, and e-mail, and logged all the contacts. She dug up the last three volumes on a case to write up a court report. She met with a mom who showed up without an appointment.

By then, it was 2:20 p.m. and Roberts grabbed a quick social worker's lunch: a candy bar and pop from the snack machine. By 4 p.m., she was wrapping up her office work and was off the clock. But still she headed out to make a home visit, which took until 5:30 p.m.

As she rushed from Friday's hearing to another home visit, she said that despite all the stress of the job, she wanted to stick it out.

"I like protecting children," Roberts said.

....

Recommendation 3: The State of Alaska needs to expand the options available to managers aimed at retaining child protection social workers.

Recommendation 4: The State of Alaska must develop a program to obtain information on, and to educate the public about, child protection and the role of the social worker to enhance the public's confidence in the social workers and the child protection system.

Recommendation 5: The State of Alaska needs to increase the number of Alaska State Troopers dedicated to the investigation of priority one reports of harm.

Recommendation 6: The State of Alaska must assure appropriate caseload levels, training, and standards for employees and contractors involved in the child protection system in order to provide quality child protection services. This assurance should encompass the Department of Law, the employees and contractors of the Office of Public Advocacy, the Public Defender Agency, and when appropriate, Tribes and Tribal organizations. The commission also recommends similar training for other attorneys for parents and judicial officers.

Recommendation 7: The State of Alaska should explore the use of parent advocates, or of a 24-hour hotline, to assure that parents receive information about the child protection legal process and services available within 12-hours of a child's removal from the home.

Goal II: IMPROVE PREVENTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

A substantial investment in expanding services needed by at risk families and children is imperative today if Alaska is truly committed to keeping children in their homes safely and returning them promptly when they must be removed. (CSFR, p. 14, Items 35, 36.) Not only would this investment fulfill our obligation to the children of this state, it would ultimately reduce future expense to the state in the form of more complex treatments and additional law enforcement and corrections resources.

Lack of culturally relevant prevention and treatment services available in a continuum of care adversely affects families and children in every phase of the child protection process. The shortage of culturally relevant services in Alaska, in both urban and rural settings, is having a negative impact on safety, prevention, reunification, placement stability, and child well being. (CSFR, p. 14, Item 35.) In order to have a realistic chance of preventing serious abuse and neglect in at risk families, to the greatest degree possible, DFYS, Tribes, and other appropriate entities must intervene early and engage the parents in remedial services they may access while the child remains in the home. (CSFR, p. 4, Item 3.) Similarly, to have a realistic chance of reuniting a child with his family, the parents must have access to appropriate remedial services they can engage immediately to have the best chance of success. (CSFR, p. 6, Item 8.)

The most common problem in child abuse and neglect cases is parental alcohol or drug abuse. The "Waiting in Line" study, published in late 2001, established that an average

of 302 people who want substance abuse treatment are on waiting lists for services. Twenty-nine percent of these are women with children. About half of the women on wait lists had children in out-of-home placement. Women seeking treatment in a program where they could bring their children with them waited more than three months for a treatment bed. As the study recognized, the waiting list data understated the lack of resources because some people will not sign on to a waiting list even if they recognize they need treatment, and for many people in need of treatment, there is no facility at which they could even get on a wait list.

There is no comparable study of wait lists to get children and their parents into mental health treatment. Yet even in the larger communities, the demand for publicly funded treatment for DFYS clients far exceeds the available counseling hours. Services that will treat the whole family as a group are particularly limited. The inadequacy of services for children is evident in the fifty to sixty children who have been sent at any given time to other states for residential psychiatric care because of the lack of appropriate facilities in Alaska. Experience shows that children generally make better progress in such programs when they are placed close to their homes. The family needs to be involved in visitation, in the child's treatment and in discharge planning; they can do that best if they are close enough to be physically present when requested.

Recommendation 8: Substance abuse and mental health service delivery systems must be reorganized to favor families and children at risk for removal. To be most effective with these families, substance abuse and mental health treatment resources must be available on demand, when the parents are willing and ready to use those services, as experience around the country is beginning to demonstrate. Particular attention needs to be focused on increasing the availability of services in rural as well as urban Alaska. Since this goal involves long-term capacity building, it is imperative that children and their families be given priority access to substance abuse and mental health assessment and treatment. (CSFR, pp. 14, 6, Items 35, 8.)

Recommendation 9: The State of Alaska should work with the Tribes to develop integrated services to assure the availability of culturally appropriate resources that will be effective in protecting children and strengthening Alaska Native families. (CSFR, p. 14, Item 36.)

Recommendation 10: The State of Alaska should support and fully implement the "Bring the Kids Home" initiative, which will return children in out-of-state treatment to appropriate treatment in Alaska.

PREVENTION SERVICES

Recommendation 11: The State of Alaska must restore or provide new funding for prevention services that will focus on helping communities heal and provide for the safety of their own children.

Recommendation 12: A special program should be funded to reduce the incidence of repeat maltreatment to children remaining in their homes after an initial report of harm has been received. Most of these reports occur in neglect cases in both rural and urban Alaska, often related to substance abuse. Within each community, local resources and contractors should provide safeguards for children left in their homes while the family is participating in services to remedy their problems. (CSFR, p. 14, Item 35.) One part of the program should include combining efforts with Tribes and Tribal organizations to reach the Alaska Native families which comprise the largest portion of the neglect reports. (CSFR, p. 4, Item 2.)

REUNIFICATION SERVICES

Recommendation 13: The child protection system should develop, with appropriate service providers, a comprehensive, culturally relevant, multi-disciplinary assessment mechanism for adults and children entering the child protection system to assist in connecting the family with a culturally relevant continuum of care that will meet their treatment needs. In particular, early assessment of children for FAS/FAE and other developmental problems is critical to ensure appropriate specialized services and educational programs. (CSFR, p. 14, Item 35.) The parties in these cases would use the assessment information to jointly craft a case plan that parties can work on collaboratively.

Recommendation 14: Alternative dispute resolution, like mediation and family group conferencing, should be available and encouraged in appropriate child in need of aid cases. It is in the best interest of Alaska's children for the adults to resolve child in need of aid cases outside the courtroom, while modeling appropriate conflict resolution skills.

Recommendation 15: Since reunification does not guarantee the long term safety and stability of the child and family, community based services must continue to assist them in reestablishing healthy connections which can become their support system in their community.

GOAL III: IMPROVE CARE AND STABILITY FOR CHILDREN REMOVED FROM THEIR HOMES

Seeing and responding from the child's perspective to the placement issues created by removal requires a refocusing of the placement process and a commitment to increase the resources invested in this process. For the child, it is critical that she be placed with adults who will help her feel safe and make sense out of what has just happened to her. A child's sense of safety and trust grows out of having her needs met promptly and appropriately. The sense of security can also be fostered by maintaining continuity in education and school placement.

FOSTER CARE

When a child is removed from his home, a substitute placement must be found quickly, but the placement on removal must satisfy as many of the child's immediate needs as humanly possible, to counteract the upheaval the child has just experienced. A consistent, accepting, and nurturing home is often the best "treatment" that can be provided to a child in out-of-home placement. The better matched the initial placement is with the child's needs, the less likely it is that the child will have to suffer the further trauma of moving to another temporary placement. Having to change foster homes a number of times compounds the child's sense of dislocation and anxiety. (CSFR, p. 6, Item 6.)

The current pool of foster parents is not adequate to the demands created by the number of children needing placements. Children with special needs, like FAS/FAE, developmental delays or mental health problems, need foster parents who have been specially trained in how best to respond to that child's needs. Rural communities generally have almost no licensed foster homes and those that exist have inadequate opportunities for training, particularly about special needs children. The lack of training and readily available support in times of crisis often leads foster parents to become frustrated and give up on a particular child or on maintaining their licenses. When foster parents give up, the child may feel rejected and there is often little time to find a new, appropriate home for the child. The child's sense of rejection and special needs can then lead to a spiral of failed placements, which further harms the child.

Most children experience at least two placements because the circumstances that lead to taking them into custody usually result in an emergency placement, which is intended to be short term. In some communities, or with some age groups like teens, these "short term" placements stretch out for weeks and months because of the unavailability of suitable long-term placements. In rural communities, the placement challenge is often compounded by a need for the emergency placement to be arranged by a social worker on

the phone to tide the child over until the social worker can fly into the community to investigate.

Although Alaska Native and American Indian children represent 60.4 percent of the children in out-of-home care, there are not enough Alaska Native and American Indian foster homes to accommodate these children. Under the Indian Child Welfare Act, an Alaska Native or American Indian child must be placed in "the least restrictive setting that most approximates a family and in which his special needs, if any, may be met" and "within reasonable proximity to his . . . home, taking into account any special needs of the child." Preference must be given to a member of the extended family, a foster home licensed or approved by the Tribe, an Indian foster home licensed by the state, or an institution approved by a Tribe or operated by a Tribal organization. While the Tribes have been increasing their capacity to handle child abuse and neglect in their communities, most are only beginning to develop a program for training and licensing foster homes.

Recommendation 16: DFYS must accomplish early and thorough relative searches, if not by the caseworker then by a trained paraprofessional. Early success in a relative search may allow the child to be safely placed with a familiar person immediately, or soon after removal, thereby giving her a sense of family continuity. (CSFR, p. 8, Item 15.)

Recommendation 17: The State of Alaska should support the Tribes in developing a broader pool of trained and Tribally licensed foster homes that may also serve Tribal children in the state system. (CSFR, p. 16, Item 44.)

Recommendation 18: In order to greatly expand its pool of foster homes, especially therapeutic foster homes, to meet the demand for dedicated, nurturing homes, the child protection system should more effectively recruit foster homes. (CSFR, P. 16, Item 44.) The system should provide on going training to meet the specialized needs of children in particular homes (such as FAS/FAE or child sexual abuse). In addition, the system should consult with foster parents to develop retention incentives and eliminate the disincentives, which may include revisions to the way foster parents are paid to take into account the level of care and skill required by the children in a particular home. Finally, the system should work with foster parents to develop a formal support resource available especially outside regular business hours, the time when crises are most likely to overwhelm a person. Paraprofessional workers could be used to match the skills of available foster parents to the needs of particular children coming into the system. (CSFR, p. 6, Item 6.)

Recommendation 19: Foster care rates need to be increased. Room and board rates should be standardized across all state agencies, with specialized services being covered

by augmentation of base rates. The room and board rates for the assisted living program in the Department of Administration should be looked at for comparability.

Recommendation 20: DFYS should reexamine its approach to emergency placements to determine whether emergency placement can effectively be combined with initial assessment, family and child support services, and respite care.

VISITATION

While keeping the child safe and secure, the child must also be enabled to maintain the connections that support reunification, through contact with his parents, siblings, and other familiar relatives. (CSFR, p. 7, Item 13.) Even if visitation needs to be supervised so that the child is not put at further risk, it still needs to occur in a setting that encourages open and comfortable interactions among the family members. DFYS currently lacks space and personnel to provide positive visitation experiences.

When children are removed from their mother alone, the father is often unknown or absent, yet if he could be located more resources for placement, reunification, or support of the child might be opened up. (CSFR, p. 8, Item 16.)

Recommendation 21: The division should seek additional funding in FY 2004 to replicate the Anchorage visitation program in other communities. The division should also seek opportunities to partner with Tribes, faith-based, and other community organizations to provide for high quality visitation outside of division offices, especially in communities that are too small to support a state-funded visitation center.

Recommendation 22: The State of Alaska should provide frequent and quality visitation for children with incarcerated parents by establishing child-friendly, developmentally appropriate visitation areas that are not only safe, but encourage and maintain positive parent-child relationships and preserve attachment bonds. This recommendation would include the provision of telephone areas and educational materials that encourage positive parent-child communication and provision of regularly scheduled transportation to and from prison facilities.

CASE PLANS

Continued contact alone will not lead to reunification. The family must resolve the problems that led to removal of the child. Parents are more likely to actively participate in remedial services if they have a voice in framing the plan for those services. With Alaska Native families, Tribes can be good resources not only for direct services to families, but also for help in identifying a culturally relevant plan for remediation. (CSFR, p. 9, Item 18.)

Recommendation 23: DFYS must ensure that parents, children when old enough, and the Tribes of Alaska Native children are directly involved in developing case plans for the family.

Recommendation 24: DFYS must pursue immediate identification of the father of each child removed from home. (CSFR, p. 8, Item 16.)

AGING OUT OF THE SYSTEM

Youths who age out of the system without having been reunified with their families or placed in another permanent home are among the most vulnerable teens and are at risk to repeat the cycle of abuse and neglect in their own families.

Recommendation 25: In collaboration with Tribes and community organizations, DFYS needs to provide transitional planning, special skill building services and appropriate support to help older youths successfully transition to adulthood.

MEASUREMENT OF PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY

Duties of the Commission No. 5: Provide recommendations for the creation of a formal and periodic process for clients and stakeholders to evaluate child protection system performance.

Alaska needs a quality improvement program that ensures that standards for quality services to children and families are met each day. Collection of data and information by itself is not enough. We need regular and reliable sources of information as well as regular and predictable means for stakeholders and clients to give their information to the division. The collection of data and information is a step on the way to the goal of a comprehensive quality assurance program that takes the initiative rather than being reactive to crises, uninformed external scrutiny, and pressure. (CSFR, p. 13, Item 31.)

A new approach to quality assurance, called continuous quality improvement, is a program that assesses practice and outcomes as well as compliance. It uses data, information, and results to effect positive changes in policy and case practice. Continuous quality improvement engages a broad range of internal and external partners in the process at all levels, as well as children and families. One of the Division of Family and Youth Services' strengths noted by the recent *Alaska Child and Family Services Review* is the division's responsiveness to the public. That responsiveness can become a mainstay of a comprehensive quality assurance program. (CSFR, p. 15, Items 38, 40.)

On-line Resources for the Children of Alaska (ORCA) is the DFYS initiative to update its information system to cover not only compliance requirements but to allow the division to gather and analyze a wide variety of information and data. It is the most important next step in the creation of a continuous quality improvement program. ORCA is a means to have a positive effect on all phases of the child protection system from the first report of harm to permanency planning.

ORCA will allow the division to automate its paper processes and free social workers to spend less time on paperwork and more time responding to children and families. There are nearly 140 separate forms that a social worker may need to use. Each of the social workers' contacts with families is recorded in writing. The act of filling out forms and writing notes is time consuming. Along with the recent provision of transcription services, ORCA will streamline the division's current paper based business practices.

With an enhanced capacity to evaluate its performance the division will have capability to determine where resources should be used. The gathering and analysis of information and data and the translation of that information into meaningful reports to managers and

line workers will give the division the ability to evaluate its efforts and to reinforce successful ones.

Recommendation 26: The Division of Family and Youth Services needs to complete the development and implementation of On Line Resources for Children in Alaska (ORCA), a statewide automated child welfare information system (SACWIS). As part of development and implementation, ORCA's capabilities need to be reviewed to see that the division's system could interface with other management information systems, such as the Alaska Court System's new case management system and Tribal child protection data management systems. (CSFR, p. 15, Items 39, 40.)

Recommendation 27: The commissioner of Health and Social Services, in consultation with the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement and with the involvement of clients and stakeholders, needs to develop a written document creating a continuous quality improvement program for DFYS that includes:

- adoption of goals, outcomes, and standards;
- incorporation of quality assurance throughout the system;
- collection of data and information including quantitative data;
- a case review process;
- strategies to listen to and involve agency staff, clients, and external stakeholders in the collection and evaluation of data and information;
- an examination of a variety of other information available as a result of other review processes;
- an analysis of data and information by persons capable of translating data into reports that illustrate the agency's performance and help other staff, stakeholders, and clients plan and make necessary improvements, and use of the analysis and information to make improvements to the child protection system. (CSFR, p. 15, Item 39.)

Recommendation 28: The Division of Family and Youth Services should share pertinent data, information, plans, and analyses, through electronic linkages with other state agencies or Tribes involved in child protection functions to insure coordination of services to children and families. (CSFR, p. 13, Item 31.)

COORDINATION

Duties of the Commission No. 6: Provide recommendations for the continuation of formal mechanisms to improve coordination among state agencies in the child protection system.

Recommendation 29: Within the next 30 days, each department covered by the Interagency Agreement signed in 1998 (Health and Social Services, Education and Early Development, Law, Public Safety, and Corrections) should update or complete the departmental protocol mandated by that agreement, including written policies and procedures covering the department's response to child abuse and neglect and the sharing of information necessary to protect children's health and safety. (See pages 6 and 8 of the agreement.)

Recommendation 30: The next governor should continue a Children's Cabinet consisting of the commissioners of the departments of Health and Social Services, Law, Education and Early Development, Public Safety, and Corrections, with the addition of the commissioner of the Department of Administration.

Recommendation 31: Partner agencies in child protection should continue a director level Steering Committee that includes the Alaska Court System to monitor progress on funded initiatives regarding child abuse and neglect and to address identified systemic barriers to effective child protection.

Recommendation 32: The Division of Family and Youth Services should continue regional and local meetings of middle management from state agencies and appropriate local agencies involved in the child protection system, at least quarterly, to identify and resolve practical barriers to effective child protection.

Recommendation 33: The Department of Health and Social Services should continue participation by the director and senior managers of the Division of Family and Youth Services and other appropriate Department of Health and Social Services divisions in the Tribal/State Collaboration Group.

Recommendation 34: The commission also recognizes there are effective informal, voluntary, mechanisms at the local level, such as the "Fix-It" group that meets regularly in Anchorage to resolve practical problems in their own jurisdiction's child protection system. The commission strongly encourages child protection system participants in each community to continue such efforts in the future.

Recommendation 35: Collaboration with health care and child development professionals can play a critical role in helping the courts and case workers translate information about children in foster care and their caregivers in ways that aid in making decisions concerning placement stability, visitation, and permanency.

COMMISSION MEMBERS

Elaine M. Andrews, Superior Court Judge, Third Judicial District, Anchorage

James R. Ayers, Executive Director, Oceana, Juneau

Carol H. Brice, owner/consultant, Family Training Associates, Alaska Children's Trust
Board Chair, Fairbanks

Francine Eddy Jones, Manager, Tribal Family and Youth Services, Central Council
Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Juneau

Alison Elgee, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Administration, Juneau

Susan Humphrey-Barnett, Assistant Administrator, Providence Hospital, Anchorage

Jewel Jones, Director, Department of Health and Human Services, Municipality of
Anchorage, Anchorage

Elmer Lindstrom, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Health and Social Services,
Juneau

Brant G. McGee, Public Advocate, Office of Public Advocacy, Anchorage

Lisa B. Nelson, Assistant Attorney General, Department of Law, Anchorage

John R. Pugh, Chancellor, University of Alaska Southeast, Juneau

Colleen A Ray, attorney, Anchorage

Robert I. Shoaf, Immediate Past Chair, Alaska State Chamber of Commerce, Anchorage

Del Smith, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety, Juneau

Gloria Stuart, foster and adoptive parent, Homer

Theresa Tanoury, Director, Division of Family and Youth Services, Department of
Health and Social Services, Juneau

Don Shircel, Director, Family Services, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc., Fairbanks

MEETING SCHEDULE

August 22, 2002, Frontier Building, Room 896, Anchorage

September 6, 2002, Legislative Information Office, Anchorage (statewide teleconference to receive public testimony)

September 13 and 14, 2002, Frontier Building, Room 896, Anchorage

September 20, 2002, Frontier Building, Room 1404, Anchorage (joint meeting with Court Improvement Project)

September 21, 2002, Frontier Building, Room 896, Anchorage

September 24, 2002, Frontier Building, Room 896, Anchorage

APPENDIX A

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 198

I, Tony Knowles, Governor of the State of Alaska, under the authority of article III, sections 1 and 24, of the Alaska Constitution, and in accordance with AS 44.19.145(c) establish the Commission on Child Protection (Commission) in the Office of the Governor.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The protection of children who have been abused and neglected is a core responsibility of the State of Alaska. The child protective services system is complex and requires the constant attention of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of state government. The child protection system is, by its very nature, controversial insofar as it involves the state in the most personal aspects of many Alaskans' lives.

Through the "Smart Start for Alaska's Children" initiative and other efforts, measurable progress has been made on many fronts—more reports of harm against children investigated, a rewritten child protection law, speedier adoptions, and better basic health care for thousands of children.

In accordance with federal law, the State of Alaska is undergoing a comprehensive review of its child protection system. The release of that review is imminent and will identify strengths and weaknesses in the child protection system.

Every year since 1997, the Legislature has been asked to provide additional resources to both improve the child protection system, as well as to provide support to children and families at risk of entering the system. The Legislature has funded some of these requests, and the result has been a significant improvement to the system—more adoptions through the "Balloon Project" and thousands more children with basic health care through our Denali KidCare program, for example. Many other requests were not funded by the Legislature. Just a few examples—extra troopers for child sexual assault denied, no additional funding to expand the "Dual Track" program to investigate minor reports of harm, and rejection of a modest rate increase to help us attract and retain foster parents. Additional funding and improvements to the child protection system are needed.

The purpose of this Administrative Order is to recognize the need to identify and quantify appropriate next steps to further strengthen the system. The report of the Commission should serve to educate all Alaskans about the tragedy of child abuse, generate the

commitment of candidates for public office to continue to improve the child protection system, and lead to budgetary recommendations for additional resources.

DUTIES OF THE COMMISSION

The duty of the Commission is to prepare and submit a report to the Governor by October 1, 2002, that includes, but is not limited to, the following:

A review of recent reports and findings related to the child protection system including review of at least the following: *Child Protection Review Team Report to Governor Knowles*, (December 1997); reports of the legislative auditor; and the findings of the federal review of child and family services programs under federal law.

An assessment of the impact of recent enhancements to the child protective services systems including at least the following: the Balloon Project; state/tribal collaborative efforts; the health passport program; and the training academy.

Recommendations for elements to be included in the Program Improvement Plan, which is under development in response to the findings of the review under federal law.

Recommendations for additional improvements to systems and services that support the child protection system or support families and children at risk of entering the child protection system, including mental health and substance abuse treatment services.

Recommendations for the creation of a formal and periodic process for clients and stakeholders to evaluate child protection system performance.

Recommendations for the continuation of formal mechanisms to improve coordination among state agencies in the child protection system.

Documentation of child protection case scenarios that highlight the successes and continuing challenges of the child protection system.

MEMBERSHIP

The Commission will consist of members appointed by the Governor to serve at the pleasure of the Governor. The Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services, or the commissioner's designee, shall chair the Commission.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Commission members do not receive compensation as a member of the Commission. Members of the Commission who are not state employees are entitled to per diem and travel expenses in the same manner permitted for members of state boards and commissions. Per diem and travel expenses for members of the Commission who are appointed as a member of a state agency are the responsibility of that state agency.

This Order takes effect immediately.

DATED at Juneau, Alaska, this 12th day of August, 2002.

Tony Knowles
Governor

TK:BS:mm

APPENDIX B

Report of the Governor's Commission
On Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
1	Co-location of law enforcement, social workers (SW), health care providers.			Not implemented.	
2	Volunteer, multi-disciplinary team for consultation by SW's.			Since 1998, the interagency agreement provided for DFYS to form regional or local multi-disciplinary groups to work on improving coordination.	
3	Foster parents should be given complete information regarding prospective placements & recognized as valuable source of information on child.	See 21 below.		AS 47.10.093 now explicitly provides for giving foster parents necessary information; AS 47.10.030 requires actual notice of the proceedings to foster parents and AS 47.10.070 gives them a right to be heard at any hearing. (1998)	
4	Criminal prosecution expedited to avoid delay in CINA cases.			Some CINA cases with related criminal cases are being tried now regardless of completion of the criminal proceeding.	
5	The Department of Education & DFYS set up working group to develop information sharing guidelines that maintain confidentiality.			Not implemented.	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/11/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
6	State departments should eliminate barriers caused by organizational & budget structures that impede service delivery & coordination.			Interdepartmental Child Abuse Agreement signed 9/98 emphasizing mutual reporting and employee training; each dept to develop own internal protocol to comply.	
7	Child protection (CP) agencies review & revise information sharing regulations, policies, procedures.		DFYS reevaluate scope and application of confidentiality requirements, especially as impact parental cooperation. (8/11/98)	Governor Knowles appointed a task force to review confidentiality laws and recommend changes. Resulting legislation was introduced in 2000 to open some records and court proceedings to public on CINA cases, but did not deal w/ parental complaints. Bills did not pass. Partially implemented - LA4. (Note: Legislative Audits 3 and 4 review prior audit recommendations for implementation status. This column will reference Legislative Audit's view of implementation status as reported, i.e., "partially implemented", and note which audit reports this status, i.e., "LA4".)	
8	Amend statute regarding information sharing in CP cases to include federal law enforcement.			AS 47.10.093 now permits DFYS to disclose info to a "law enforcement agency of this state or another jurisdiction" as necessary to protection of child or public safety. (1998)	

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
9	Use consistent terms, definitions & forms across agencies.			Child in need of aid (CINA) statute revisions provide definitions for several terms & cross reference others to criminal code & domestic violence statutes. (1998)	
10	Improve interagency education/training on availability of info relevant to CP decisions.			See 6 above.	

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/11/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
11	Review processes for dealing with reports of harm (ROH) to see if working as intended or change in law would improve response in cases involving crimes against children.	DFYS should do a broader assessment at the beginning of each case, including prior ROHs, training in how to elicit more useful info, Identify constellation of family problems, develop "red flag" system for families w/ significant CP history, set up multidisciplinary teams for consultation, obtain base line health & developmental data; revise RAT.	<p>Develop clear & consistent policy re when ROHs can be left uninvestigated. (3/26/98)</p> <p>Improve relevance of forms used to assess risk (RAT) and provide more consistent and on-going supervisory review. (8/11/98)</p> <p>Develop alternative to closing cases where services are needed, but not custody, & ensure follow-up. (8/11/98)</p> <p>Ensure front line workers are involved with contractor in new RAT development & adequately trained (2/18/00)</p> <p>In hiring and promotion, DFYS should consider impact on ability to respond to ROHs. (2/18/00)</p>	<p>DFYS has developed a policy regarding when and how reports of harm to children may be left uninvestigated. Additionally, DFYS has established "targets for workload adjusting" for the offices where resources do not meet the demand for services. Partially implemented - LA4.</p> <p>DFYS in 2001 developed a Structured Decision Making process that assesses the risk and safety of the child throughout the life of the case. Policies and procedures are in place that support the supervisors' role in approving SDM on a case.</p> <p>DFYS is using appropriate risk factors, especially age, and achieving more consistency across regions(LA4).</p> <p>Dual track pilots began in 1999. Mat-Su contracted w/ non-profit agency to investigate Priority 3 ROHs that would otherwise be workload adjusted.</p> <p>Has been improvement in forms. Partially implemented - LA4.</p> <p>Grantees are required to accept DFYS referrals based on ROHs, but DFYS does not have staff to monitor.</p>	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
12	Aggressive education campaign to inform public regarding scope & impact of child abuse & neglect in Alaska.			<i>Children of a Hidden War</i> was published in March 1998. New edition expected in November 2002. Annual presentations have been made to the legislature, which are generally carried on Gavel to Gavel; additional presentations are made to interested community groups on request.	
13	Provide regular training for professionals who come in regular contact with children regarding identification of abuse & neglect, reporting, & resources available to help the professionals.			School districts and state departments required to provide training for employees since 1986. Interagency agreement required each department to develop policies and procedures for training employees. Assistant attorney generals are invited periodically to speak to local professional groups on various topics regarding child abuse and neglect, especially after passage of the revisions to the CINA law in 1998.	
14	In non-urban areas, agencies should coordinate activities to minimize the problems of geography & isolation in responding to ROHs.			Since 1998, the interagency agreement provided for DFYS to form regional or local multi-disciplinary groups to work on improving coordination.	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
15	Encourage each rural community to set up a community support team.			AS 47.10.093(b) permits disclosure to multidisciplinary teams. (1998) Since 1998, the interagency agreement provided for DFYS to form regional or local multi-disciplinary groups.	
16	Pursue coordination of city & state CP resources aggressively.			Several municipalities have day care assistance programs that work with DFYS, but no municipality exercises general child protection powers.	
17	Create system to track school children's enrollment throughout the state.			Not implemented.	
18	Set up 24-hour access to DFYS & DOC information for emergency responders.			Systems are not currently compatible, although each department is updating its information system.	
19	Make social workers & probation officers available 24/7 to assist in emergencies.			Insufficient staffing to accomplish this recommendation.	
20	DFYS should enhance visitation opportunities for children's families.			AS 47.10.080(p) requires DFYS to provide reasonable visitation to family members.	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
21	Increase foster home availability by increasing stipend & recruitment, especially seeking ethnic diversity.	Improve recruitment, use & support of foster parents by assessing their capabilities & matching with appropriate children, preparing the foster parent for each child by providing information on child's background.		Foster care rate was increased in 1998; payments for child care for foster parents and relative placements were added in 2000; residential care rates were increased in 2001. "Foster a Future" recruitment campaign began in 1999.	
22	Increase access to substance abuse treatment for families involved in CP system	Increase family monitoring during treatment and aftercare.		Individual programs have been added in various communities, but not enough to meet the demand.	
23	Fully fund & implement "family support unit" in DFYS.			Information not available to the commission	
24	Fund DFYS at level that would meet Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) caseload standards (12 new investigations per month; 17 in home cases; 12-15 out of home cases).		Fund 30-40 new social worker positions to better meet statutory mandates (investigation of ROHs, standards of supervision of children in custody); DFYS report back to leg on impact of funding increases. (3/26/98)	28 new workers authorized with staggered funding for FY99. (The governor requested 40.) DFYS put into operation a method of expanding the pool of available workers. FY00 - added 14 social workers for Balloon Project. In FY00, 90 percent of investigable ROHs were investigated, and regular reports were made to the legislature. Both implemented - LA4.	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
25	Balance resources within system as increase DFYS resources (Department of Law, Public Defender Agency, Office of Public Advocacy).			When additional social workers were funded in 1998 and 1999, additional staff were added to the Department of Law, Public Defender Agency, and Office of Public Advocacy.	
26	Clarify legislative intent behind CP statutes.	Include "threat of harm" in CINA statutes, improve definition of "neglect" and other terms.		AS 47.05.065 sets out extensive legislative findings regarding children. (1998)	
27	Clarify definitions and jurisdiction over children.		Amend CINA statutes to provide basis for better and more consistent casework. (3/26/98)	Definitions of what makes a child in need of aid rewritten in AS 47.10.011-.015. (1998) Implemented - LA4.	
28	Set strict guidelines and timelines covering termination of parental rights.	Do concurrent planning for permanency from beginning.	Still need creative efforts to reduce time children spend in non-permanent homes. (1/26/99)	New termination statute - AS 47.10.088 - sets requirements focused on meeting child's needs in child's time; AS 47.10.087 permits concurrent planning while making reasonable efforts to reunite; AS 47.10.080(I) requires a permanency plan to be developed within 12 months of entry into foster care; DFYS case planning forms ask for permanency plan from first plan. Balloon Project moved over 600 kids to permanency and continues to identify and work on permanency for those in care over 24 months.	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
29	Modify information sharing statutes to grant access to federal law enforcement & give DFYS access to national criminal history information.			See 8 above.	
30		Provide specialized training for screeners, investigators and case workers, and supervisors, especially in manual requirements for different stages of casework, & placement match assessment.	Continue efforts to set up integrated professional development & training program with UAA, using Title IV-E funding. (3/26/98) Ensure all line social workers receive appropriate training. (8/11/98)	Program at UAA began in fall 1998; continue to pursue federal funding to ensure stable base for program. (1/26/99) Implemented - LA4.	
31			Develop updated, accurate and relevant workload measurement model. (3/26/98)	DFYS adopted CWLA standards for different types of caseload. Not implemented - LA4. (Legislative Audit believes CWLA standards need to be combined with the new RAT.)	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/11/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
32		Ensure that each file has investigative summary & casework summaries with sufficient detail to support casework decisions.		Information not available to the commission.	
33		Provide case specific supervision for each case, especially high risk children, from investigation through resolution and document it; do periodic administrative review of supervisory activities.		Information not available to the commission.	
34		Guardians ad litem (GAL) should maintain a case summary for each case; serve as "check & balance" on oversights or errors by agencies or other professionals.		Information not available to the commission.	
35		Require new photo annually in each file.		Information not available to the commission	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
36		Revise CP manual especially regarding investigation & assessment.	Develop operating procedures and policies that reflect its operating constraints. (2/18/00) (See #43)	Manual rewritten in 1999. Structured Decision Making implemented at the beginning of 2001.	
37		Transfer cases from intake to ongoing more quickly.		Information not available to commission.	
38		Improve data collection and management system (PROBER).	Correct, upgrade or replace the current case management system. (1/26/99) Correct, upgrade or replace the current system; as DFYS begins setting up new system, must include employees responsible for data entry in design process. (2/18/00)	DFYS has been working to update PROBER. Partially implemented - LA4. DFYS plans to fully implement new data collection and management system by November 2004 (ORCA).	
39			Ensure that retirement incentive program (RIP) costs are paid in year incurred. (3/26/98) Legislature should maintain accountability for front-line social worker funding by segregating those funds from other agency operations. (2/18/00)	No more RIP violations and not allowing social worker positions to remain vacant. Implemented - LA4.	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
40			Ensure accurate and timely entry of case data into management information system (though PROBER deficient & needs to be replaced). (3/26/98)	DFYS working to update and improve accuracy of PROBER. Partially implemented - LA4. See 39 above.	
41			Document involvement of parents in case plan development. (8/11/98) Make it policy to record efforts to contact parents if signature cannot be obtained. (2/18/00)	Not implemented - LA4. Policy now requires parents to sign case plan or worker must document why parent did not. Compliance inconsistent especially in initial case plan. (See federal review self-assessment, p. 21.)	
42			Commissioner of DHSS develop non-judicial alternatives to provide recourse & consideration to parents & other interested parties in CP service disputes: improved notice of agency grievance procedure; ombudsman's office; community level mediation. (8/11/98) Continue to explore non-judicial alternatives to enhance communications with general public & provide recourse to parents in CP disputes. (2/18/00)	Mediation available for case resolution beginning in 2000; now in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kenai, Bethel, Kotzebue, Homer, Seward; DFYS has person in central office to respond to inquiries regarding particular casework decisions. Partially implemented - LA4.	

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

No.	CP Review Team (12/11/97)	Kempe Center (12/1/97)	Legislative Audits	Responses To Date	Commission Recommendations
43			<p>Transition into a style more conducive to long-range planning, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - include policy and procedures that recognize budget constraints; - maintain accountability for front-line social worker funding by segregating those funds from other agency operations; - improve case management documentation; improve management information system. (2/18/00) 	Information not available to commission.	
44			<p>DHSS responded to the auditors that other issues not addressed by the audit were critical too: (1)The department needs more placement resources and an increased focus on the quality and safety of out of home placements.; (2) DHSS needs greater efforts and resources to resolve family problems so children can be returned home or placed in other permanent homes. (2/18/00)</p>	Information not available to commission.	

APPENDIX C

The following is provided for informational purposes only. These recommendations were submitted by individual commissioners for the Governor's Commission on Child Protection's consideration; however, some of them were not discussed by the commission, and others did not receive full commission concurrence. It must also be noted that not all commissioners submitted individual recommendations for review, so the list is not exhaustive.

COMPILATION OF COMMISSIONERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

1. IMPROVE QUALITY AND FREQUENCY OF VISITATION.

- * Establish interagency teams to address issue
- * Be more creative regarding visitation sites
- * More visitation centers
- * Seek funding from corporations
- * Work with government agencies, including tribes
- * Work with community nonprofits
- * Work with faith community
- * Solicit other community volunteers

I totally agree that the faith community should be brought into this arena in a big way. Not just the usual agencies that are faith based like Salvation Army, Catholic Social Services, etc. but specifically church groups. This is their mission - to assist those in need. We must find ways to allow them to participate and the establishment of family visitation centers using their existing church facilities would be ideal. There should be little to no cost and with the already established missions/groups in each church (Pastor's Aid, Deaconess Board, etc.) there should be a willing group, with some training if needed, that could begin to supervise visits right away. I would estimate that in Anchorage alone, 10 centers could be set up in less than 90 days. This would be my number one recommendation that could see immediate improvement in the system for very little cost.

*. Visitations
should also occur in places conducive to family healing. DFYS office space often seems to hinder rather than help the family to re-bond.*

- Frequent visitation is critical to maintaining parent-child and sibling bonds and promoting the reunification of families.
- Cook Inlet Tribal Councils visitation program model in Anchorage should be expanded and replicated. The commission heard testimony that the non -

judgmental and supportive atmosphere in a home like setting was very much needed and appreciated by client's who utilized this resource.

Explanation: The Commission has heard extensive testimony that the Division of Family & Youth Services lacks the capacity to provide for quality visitation between children in custody and families. The Division should seek additional funding in FY 04 to replicate the Anchorage visitation program in other large communities. The Division should also actively seek opportunities to partner with faith-based and other community organizations to provide for high quality visitation outside of Division offices in communities that are of insufficient size to support a state-funded visitation center.

Expand community based visitation centers to facilitate frequent visiting with parents and siblings in foster care.

COLLABORATE TO PROVIDE FREQUENT AND QUALITY VISITATION FOR CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS BY ESTABLISHING CHILD-FRIENDLY, DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE VISITATION AREAS THAT ARE NOT ONLY SAFE, BUT THAT ENCOURAGE/MAINTAIN POSITIVE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND PRESERVE ATTACHMENT BONDS. THIS RECOMMENDATION WOULD INCLUDE THE PROVISION OF TELEPHONE AREAS AND EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS THAT ENCOURAGE POSITIVE PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION, AND PROVISION OF REGULARLY SCHEDULED TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM PRISON FACILITIES.

Comment: Prison facilities do not include a hospitable area for incarcerated parents to visit with their children. Current visitation areas and practices are daunting to a child, and discourage positive parent-child relationships. Available telephone areas and regulations are also inhibiting factors. Transportation to and from prison facilities to allow frequent visitation between parents and children is often fraught with logistical difficulties. Consideration should be given to the availability of a children's counselor both at the prison during visitation and on the transportation vehicle, especially if the arrangement is for groups of unrelated children.

Increase availability of visitation services: DFYS should provide, or contract for, additional opportunities for parent/child visitations. Parents with children in state custody and providers underscored the importance of this service in fostering family re-unification. The Anchorage program has proven to be very successful. A similar service should be made available to more communities.

2. INCREASE THE MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT RESOURCES FOR ADULTS, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND REDUCE THE CURRENT WAITLIST TO ACCESS TREATMENT

Collaborative efforts with local government, non-profits working together to obtain more funding for substance abuse treatment. Make a particular effort to involve tribal and native non-profit groups.

This is a major task, but one that should show quick results if the availability of beds and programs that allow parents to keep their children while in treatment is an option. Before the end of the Knowles Administration, a conference of interested parties and stakeholders should be held to begin the framework for such an effort.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT PREGNANT, ALCOHOLIC WOMEN WHO WANT HELP HAVE LIVE-IN SHELTERS TO REMAIN SOBER AND PROTECT THEIR BABIES DURING THE PREGNANCY. Comment: We know the need and demand for shelters for alcoholic woman far exceeds the beds available. This is not cost effective. Preventing even a few fetal alcohol syndrome births would save the state of Alaska millions of dollars that it will spend on each child, and then more for those entering the criminal justice system due to pre-natal alcohol exposure.

- The C & S Management survey showed that on any given day in Alaska an average of 302 people who want treatment for alcoholism or substance abuse are on a waiting list, and it is believed that this number underestimates the total need.
- Alaska has the highest documented rate of fetal alcohol syndrome in the nation. Estimated life time cost of services to an individual with FAS is \$1.4 million. Research shows that early screening, diagnosis and individualized services reduce the likelihood that affected individuals will develop secondary disabilities associated with FAS and FAE, including mental health problems, problems with employment, school difficulty, involvement with the criminal justice system/incarceration, substance abuse problems and inappropriate sexual behavior.
- Programs are needed to expand the capacity to assist dual diagnosis treatment needs (i.e. mental health/substance abuse/cognitive delays)
- Programs are needed to expand the capacity to accommodate the treatment needs of women with children and pregnant women. (i.e. AWRC, Den A Coy, Fairbanks Program for Women and Children). FAS/FAE is a preventable birth defect and increased efforts must be made to improve the social service delivery and support to women at risk for giving birth to an alcohol-affected child.
- Collaborate with the Office of FAS on community education, prevention, diagnostic efforts and needed services.

- Facilitate and promote cross disciplinary education and community awareness about early screening, identification, diagnosis and individualized services needed to address FAS/FAE. (This should include parents, social workers, caretakers, foster parents, treatment providers, mental health providers, teachers, judges, lawyers, juvenile and adult probation officers, recreation staff, ICWA workers etc)

PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM SHOULD HAVE TIMELY ACCESS TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS AND TREATMENT SERVICES.

Explanation: The Commission has heard consistent and compelling testimony from the public and agencies that insufficient funding is available for substance abuse treatment. The Division of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse compiled a waitlist for treatment and the Division should request funding to eliminate this waitlist. Passage of the alcohol tax increase last year and creation of an account in the general fund in which 50% of alcohol excise tax revenues are available for appropriation for treatment services provides an opportunity to seek additional funding from the legislature in 2003. In addition, the Commission heard testimony that appropriate residential placements for children with mental health needs is often lacking. The result may be an over reliance on inpatient psychiatric treatment.

Develop priority within substance abuse and mental health treatment services for children and families involved in child protection system.

CREATE MORE OPTIONS AND MORE CREATIVE OPTIONS FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT

- * Expansion of family care court
- * Increase programs where children can be with parent(s) in residential treatment
- * Increase ease, timeliness and quality of substance abuse assessments (Ex. more assessors co-located at DFYS offices)
- * Increase treatment beds for CINA parents

WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE PLAYING SUCH A LARGE ROLE IN CHILD PROTECTION, I RECOMMEND COMBINED FUNDING TO APPROACH THE PROBLEMS MORE EFFECTIVELY:

*REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WIDELY AVAILABLE, BOTH RURAL AND URBAN, ALLOWING FOR INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY RESIDENTIAL AND OUTPATIENT TREATMENT;

*NO WAIT LISTS FOR TREATMENT;

*RESIDENTIAL SERVICES FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE AWAITING TREATMENT, UP TO 3 MONTHS;

*LOW-LEVEL, VOLUNTARY OUT-PATIENT THERAPY FOR MOTIVATED INDIVIDUALS

*AFTER-CARE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO ALL WHO UNDERGO TREATMENT, UP TO A YEAR;

*TREATMENT FACILITIES FOR PARENT(S) AND CHILDREN TOGETHER, WITH INTERACTIVE CHILD CARE AND PARENTING EDUCATION MANDATORY.

*TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR WOMEN WITH CHILDREN COMING OUT OF RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT.

Comments: The child protection issue in Alaska must go hand in hand with substance abuse treatment and after-care. The statistics support that. Children suffer abuse and neglect in families that are abusing alcohol and other substances. Parent education increases the chances for healthy reunification.

Increase substance abuse treatment to provide treatment on demand for any parent involved in the child protection system. Increases should be for a variety of models of treatment, including residential treatment that provides an opportunity for children to stay with the parent while in treatment if appropriate, and more in-home treatment approaches like the one that the Commission heard public testimony about - (my notes indicate it was a mobile treatment program offered by Cook Inlet)

Alcohol & Drug Abuse Treatment: A significant percentage of child abuse and neglect cases are directly or indirectly linked to parental abuse of alcohol or controlled substances (or both). Our correctional and juvenile justice populations underscore this fact. OPA testified these factors were reflected in "95 %" of their caseload. Mandatory treatment and ensuring its availability, on a timely basis, is important to breaking the cycle of violence and abuse.

There appears to be a larger need for treatment programs for women and, in particular, women with children. On average, this latter group must wait for up to 107 days to enter treatment.

INCREASE SERVICE ARRAY

1. Another way to make a social worker's job easier is to give them more tools to have at their disposal, such as: more beds for substance abuse treatment; more visitation centers, visitation hours, and visitation supervisors; more mental health treatment services; more counseling services for problems such as domestic violence issues, parenting issues, etc.

Early intervention services –

- a. Alcohol/drug abuse treatment, especially for women with children.
- b. Mental health treatment

3. FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- A decision must be made to prioritize the recruitment, support and retention of good foster homes. A plan must be spelled out and adequate resources allocated

to accomplish the goal of recruitment and retention. Consideration should be given to employing staff or utilizing volunteers with agency supervision to function as liaisons, advocates and/or ombudsmen for foster parents.

- Foster parents who accept children with FAS/FAE have a special set of challenges and demands placed on them. Children with FAS/FAE usually require more patience, more supervision and more consistency than other children. They often need constant supervision, even as teenagers and young adults. They often experience higher incidence of secondary problems (i.e. mental health, delinquent behavior etc.) They often have many appointments with treatment providers and counselors that can exhaust the care giver. They often have behaviors that exhaust care givers. Special needs children need to be supported and special attention, training, supervision and respite needs to be given to their caregivers.
- Serious consideration needs to be given to the pros and cons of a privatized foster care system.

CONTRACT WITH FOSTER PARENTS AS PAID STAFF TO IMPROVE CARE, REDUCE FAILED PLACEMENTS, AND INCREASE REUNIFICATIONS WITH FAMILIES

Comment: The Commission is aware of the devastating results of poor foster family care, i.e. abuse, neglect, runaways, and children entering the criminal justice system. The Division should study the model of contracted foster parents used successfully in British Columbia. The Division should use this model for all foster parents since all foster homes are now "therapeutic." Children who are removed from their homes are often traumatized and insecure. To aid in rehabilitation, it is necessary to have one caregiver at home full time to ensure that he or she will have the physical and emotional energy and the time to devote to the needs of the foster child. When both foster parents work out of the home, there is no time for the intense care foster children require. This usually involves multiple services including appointments to doctors, counselors, tutors, and therapists. To feed and house foster children without one significant caregiver being there full time is just that, feeding and housing them. This is failing our children. Paid foster parents would attract applicants who are better qualified, and who have the skills and potential to increase these skills.

Double the funding currently available for foster care recruitment. Allow regional foster care recruitment positions to focus solely on recruitment and retention of foster homes.

Increase foster care rates to better compensate foster parents for their care to children in custody.

ALL FOSTER PARENTS SHOULD BE REIMBURSED THE FULL COST OF PROVIDING CARE TO FOSTER CHILDREN AND AUGMENTED PAYMENTS SHOULD BE MADE TO FOSTER PARENTS, WHO BY VIRTUE OF THEIR SPECIAL TRAINING OR EXPERTISE, ARE PROVIDING THERAPEUTIC SERVICES TO THEIR FOSTER CHILDREN

Explanation: The Commission received testimony that the Division of Family and Youth Services continues to be faced with a chronic shortage of appropriate foster homes. The

Commission also received testimony that foster care base rates have not kept up with inflation in recent years. Testimony was provided that today's foster children have much more complex problems than in the past and that the role of the foster parent is evolving from that of a caregiver to something that more closely resembles a treatment provider.

INCREASE POOL OF FOSTER PARENTS

- * Consider privatization
- * Focus on retention
- * Establish staff positions as foster parent liaison
- * Use happy foster parents as recruitment tool

EXPANSION AND REVISION OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM TO INCLUDE:

- *PROFESSIONAL FOSTER PARENTS WHO ARE TRAINED TO DEAL WITH SPECIFIC DIFFICULT BEHAVIORS AND DISABILITIES IN CHILDREN (THERAPEUTIC FOSTER HOMES);
- *LEVELS OF FOSTER PARENTING THAT ARE DETERMINED BY EDUCATION, TRAINING, EXPERIENCE AND ABILITY;
- *SALARY INCREASE TO PROFESSIONAL STATUS, COMMENSURATE WITH PRE-DETERMINED SKILL LEVELS;
- *INCREASED EFFORT AND FOCUS ON RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATIVE FOSTER HOMES STATEWIDE, BOTH URBAN AND RURAL;
- *IN-HOME EDUCATION, INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT FOR FOSTER FAMILIES CARING FOR CHILDREN WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS AND/OR DISABILITIES;
- *NATIVE FOSTER PARENTS WHO INTEGRATE TRADITIONAL PARENTING PRACTICES IN THEIR HOMES;
- *INCREASED OPTIONS FOR REGULARLY SCHEDULED RESPITE FOR FOSTER FAMILIES;
- *ANNUAL OVERSIGHT OF ALL FOSTER HOMES, URBAN AND RURAL;
- *DOCUMENTED DFYS STAFF VISIT WITH ALL CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE ON A REGULARLY SCHEDULED BASIS;
- *ADDITION OF FOSTER CARE STAFF AS NECESSARY TO ACCOMPLISH THE ABOVE.

Comments: There has been considerable discussion in regard to many aspects of the foster care system. Pay scale, training, respite, child care for working foster parents, and professionalism have been at the top of the list of recommendations for consideration.

Increase reimbursement for foster care to recognize the erosion in the payment level due to inflation.

"Hire" Foster Parents: The current approach of finding "charity" parents has perhaps outlived its ability to secure enough homes for needy children. Existing foster parents receive a stipend (\$21.84 per day average), requiring most to continue employment outside the home or leaving them short of means to meet basic necessities. It is time to think of foster parents as employees; hired to tackle a most critical job.

The state should seriously consider establishing a tiered program modeled after one in British Columbia, Canada. The first tier would represent a continuation of the current program. Tier Two would be distinguished by a contract of employment between the State and the foster parent. In short, this would be their job - no outside employment or distraction. Such an approach may help address

the growing need for placement options (a diversity of skills, resources and locations). Tier Three would reflect "therapeutic" foster parents (homes for very special needs children).

ENHANCE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

1. Provide more money and support to foster parents.
2. Provide more training for foster parents.
3. Put more effort into recruitment of foster homes. Make it easy for a social worker to find a good home that is a good "match" for a child. We need to zealously solicit good homes from the community.
4. Have another agency, perhaps a contracted entity, deal with the problems in foster homes, similar to the system in Minnesota.

Out of home placement

- a. Foster care training
- b. Increased foster parent rates based on level of care system

Placement Issues

A third theme involved placement issues. Judges felt more attention should be placed on selecting appropriate foster care placements, maintaining continuity in those placements (including continuity of sibling contact), and supporting the foster parents who were caring for children with many special needs (e.g., multiple appointments for treatment, assessment, etc.).

4. ADEQUATE STAFFING FOR ALL PARTNER AGENCIES (DFYS, OPA, PDA, AGO, COURT SYSTEM AND TROOPERS)

SOCIAL WORKERS NEED SMALLER CASE LOADS, AND WE NEED MORE WORKERS!

Comment: The Commission as well as the legislature knows how difficult it is to run an effective child protection department without adequate staff. It is time to fund more workers. Front loading money in this way will save thousands of dollars in failed DFYS cases and will add productive citizens to our work force. This makes sense rather than spending the money on more incarcerations.

REDUCE THE CASELOADS OF SOCIAL WORKERS, GUARDIAN AD LITEMS, ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDERS AND ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERALS

- The commission heard testimony from clients and all agency representatives about the unacceptably high caseloads that exceed the national averages for social workers, guardian ad litem and parent's attorneys in CINA cases. Parent's testified for the need for parent aids or advocates that could help demystify the

child protection system and provide guidance and direction. Testimony from the public defender indicated that approximately half of all statewide cases are handled in Anchorage by 4.75 attorneys with caseloads of 100.

- The social worker's relationship with the adults and children in a family is the fundamental building block of a successful child protection intervention. Lower caseloads would permit social workers to deliver a strength based, family centered approach to child protection services and implement a best practice approach that emphasized client/family engagement. Early engagement encourages successful case plan completion. Solutions that rely on family strengths and creative solutions recognize individual differences, reduce the drain on limited program resources, and are more likely to reflect respect for cultural differences.

THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC ADVOCACY SHOULD DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT BEST-PRACTICE STANDARDS FOR GUARDIANS AD LITEM AND REQUEST SUFFICIENT FUNDING TO ALLOW GUARDIANS AD LITEM TO MEET THOSE STANDARDS

Explanation: In the absence of best practice standards against which both staff and contract GALs can be evaluated, it will continue to be difficult if not impossible to successfully advocate to the legislature for additional resources for the Office of Public Advocacy. First and foremost management should implement and put in place controls to assure minimum face-to-face contact standards between GALs and clients are met. GAL standards should be developed in consultation with other child protection system stakeholders. Standards should be incorporated into OPA's "Missions and Measures" document for the legislature.

Change statute requiring Guardians ad Litem to maintain standards for hiring and for best practice, including evaluating them on a regular basis and having a quality assurance process with measurable outcomes. Prohibit courts from selecting GALs without meeting hiring and evaluation requirements and allow supervision of contract GALs. (Based on testimony from DFYS managers (statewide) and OPA.)

THE DIVISION OF FAMILY AND YOUTH SERVICES SHOULD BE FUNDED TO PROVIDE FOR SUFFICIENT FRONT LINE STAFF TO SEE EVERY CHILD IN THEIR HOME AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH

Explanation: The Commission has heard extensive testimony that social workers are unable to meet existing best practice standards to see children face-to-face at home with their caregivers. This is true whether a child is placed at home with their natural parent(s) or in an out-of-home placement. Frequent contact with a child is critical to development of good case plans. The lack of direct contact between social workers and

parents and the lack of time to develop case plans with the full participation of parents relates directly to the frustration expressed by parents that social workers are constantly "changing the rules." The best way to assure that a child is safe is for a social worker to conduct frequent home visits. Home visitation standards should be incorporated into the Division's "Missions and Measures" document for the legislature.

Reduce caseloads for DFYS workers to national caseload standards (set out by CWLA). Further, recognizing that high caseloads impact safety and permanency for the child, caseloads ought to be capped with an expressed permission to seek supplemental funds when caseloads rise and all efforts to manage within existing resources are exhausted.

THE PUBLIC DEFENDER AGENCY SHOULD DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT
STANDARDS TO ASSURE THAT PARENTS RECEIVE TIMELY LEGAL
REPRESENTATION AND SHOULD REQUEST ADEQUATE FUNDING TO MEET
THESE STANDARDS

Explanation: The Commission heard extensive testimony that suggests parents do not perceive their interests are adequately represented in CINA proceedings. The Commission also heard testimony that public defender caseloads are excessive. Standards should be incorporated into the Public Defender's "Missions and Measures" document for the legislature.

Explore parent advocates in the Public Defenders' office, or otherwise increase staffing to assure parents receive legal help and advice within 12 hours of removal of their child.

Establish statutory caseload limits (for DFYS and all partner agencies)

Additional ROH Troopers: Need for five new State Troopers to investigate cases of sexual abuse of minors, serious physical assaults of minors, and criminal exploitation of children. Two of the positions would have been assigned to Palmer, two to Fairbanks and one in Soldotna. These locations are suffering the greatest backlog investigating Reports of Harm received by DFYS.

The addition of five specially trained and dedicated investigators can provide the timely, consistent response to Reports of Harm and work toward improving the safety and security of Alaska's children. Further, it would increase the potential for successful prosecution of perpetrators and justice for victims and their families.

INCREASE FUNDING LEVEL OF DHSS/DFYS SPECIFICALLY FOR SOCIAL WORKER
RECRUITMENT, SALARY INCREASES, AND INCREASED HIRING OF PARAPROFESSIONALS TO

ASSIST SOCIAL WORKERS WITH CASE LOAD; ADD BENEFITS TO ATTRACT SOCIAL WORKERS, SUCH AS IN-HOUSE (OR OUTSIDE FUNDED) CHILD CARE FOR EMPLOYEES; OFFER PART-TIME SW POSITIONS WITH BENEFITS; INCLUDE ASPECTS OF THE CORE SOCIAL WORKER TRAINING (UAA) IN SOCIAL WORK DEGREE PROGRAM; COLLABORATE WITH TRIBES FOR SW/ICWA TRAINING (SUPPORT TRIBAL COLLEGES).

Comments: This request is ongoing in discussions about improving services to families. One particular concern is the number of caseworkers a family must work with in the course of their case plan. Factors cited are SW turnover and multiple unexplained transfer of cases from one worker to another. Families must re-establish a new trusting relationship every time there is a transition. One of the goals of foster care is to maintain family bonds; the social worker is often the vehicle through which this happens.

Take the necessary steps to reduce the number of social workers involved in a case-reduced caseloads should lead to reduced turnover should lead to more ability on the part of DFYS to minimize the number of social workers on any given case.

Additional DFYS Social Workers: All parties identified the need to increase the number of front line social workers. Most importantly, disgruntled parents/guardians pointed to this issue, directly or indirectly, as a major cause of their frustration and even suspicion of the entire system. For staff, it is probably the single greatest cause of turnover and burnout.

Current caseloads far exceed national averages and needs to be addressed. Neither children nor parents are receiving the attention, support, and counsel that is required by clients overwhelmed by legal, emotional and physical abuse problems.

Staff resources

- a. Front line social worker (caseload standards)
- c. Assessment personnel

Ensure adequate AG's, PD's, GAL's, SWR's to process cases in a timely manner.

5. SOCIAL WORKER TURNOVER/ RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ISSUES

**PRIORITIZE AND DEVELOP A PLAN OF ACTION AROUND
THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL
WORKERS. CONDUCT AN INDEPENDENT AUDIT TO
DETERMINE THE CAUSE OF HIGH AGENCY TURNOVER.**

- The Department needs to work to eliminate the barriers to the hiring of qualified social workers. The Commission heard testimony about the negative impact the current hiring restrictions that require Alaskan residency have on the recruitment of qualified and experienced social workers.
- Agency turnover is a huge and intolerable problem. It is not hard to find families who have had a half dozen or more social workers. An outside audit should be implemented to determine the cause of the turnover problems and recommend solutions. Exit interviews of social workers need to be conducted to determine if it is caseloads or management practices or something else is causing the loss of so many workers.
- The agency needs to develop a cohesive written plan to address staffing issues that take into consideration annual leave, sick leave, training and turnover as all being factors that contribute to the problem. A better model needs to be developed to adequately serve clients and prevent worker burnout as a result of constantly being forced to absorb the cases of workers who leave the agency, attend school for a semester or are transferred. For example, an ongoing unit of 4 workers, 1 floating worker and 1 supervisor that carried a caseload of 25 might be better able to adapt to the need for coverage and support that is occurring.
- Supervision by inexperienced social workers and a micro management approach to decision making with a long chain of command contributes to worker and client frustration.
- Significant institutional history and wisdom has been lost in recent years and current supervisory positions have been filled by inexperienced line workers with little or no supervisory experience.

DECREASE SOCIAL WORKER TURNOVER/INCREASE MORALE

- * Determine whether more front-line SW positions can be created with existing resources
- * Seek increased funding for more SW positions with better pay
- * Establish statutory caseload limits (for DFYS and all partner agencies)
- * Conduct exit interviews (use non-DFYS employees)
- * Seek suggestions from workers
- * Develop plan to fill temporary vacancies
 - * Hire "floaters"

- * Have employees from other units fill in
- * Pursue use of contract temp social workers
- * Train supervisors (all levels) to better support employees

DECREASE SOCIAL WORKER TURNOVER: Social worker turnover is the root of many of the problems experienced by everyone involved in the child protection system. Some of the ways this problem can be addressed are as follows:

1. Decrease the caseload of line social workers to a manageable level statewide. The recommended caseload is supposed to be 15 families per social worker. If that goal is reached, social workers can do a better job at protecting children and working with families and performing all the many duties that are required by State and Federal Law. This would also result in less acrimony amongst the parties, thus less litigation, thus less stress for all concerned. This could also lead to less social worker turnover.
2. Decrease the amount of "watchdogs" that criticize the actions (or non-actions) of the overloaded social workers. There are at least eight standing watchdog entities reviewing a particular social worker's decisions - the Attorney General's office, the parents' counsel, the guardian ad litem, the court, DFYS management, the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and the Ombudsman's office. High caseloads are bad enough, without having so many entities (some with too much time on their hands and little responsibility or accountability) overseeing the social workers' work. Members representing these entities sometimes feel free to be openly critical and abusive to the individual social worker in their pursuit of their particular agenda. This is one of several reasons social worker turnover is so high. There needs to be more of a balance in numbers between the worker bees and the watchdogs.
3. Enhance the reputation of social workers. This profession needs more respect, similar to the respect given to police officers and firefighters. Some kind of public relations campaign may be in order. If social workers had more of an elevated position in the community, perhaps the public and participants in the child protection system would not be so quick to victimize these hard-working public servants.
4. See ORCA recommendation
5. Somehow restructure the system/laws to allow for a sharing of the responsibilities DFYS has toward parents and children in the "system." There is too much burden placed on the social workers with DFYS and not enough burden on any other agency involved with child protection. Take some duties away from DFYS social workers and either transfer them to other agencies or contract them out to private entities.

Caseworker Continuity/Time

The most common problem identified by respondents was lack of caseworker continuity. Judicial officers perceived that caseworker turnover (and in Anchorage the system of reassigning a case to an ongoing worker after case initiation) created a lack of continuity in case planning and processing. Lack of continuity was perceived as a barrier to effective case planning, a barrier to timely resolution of court proceedings, a contributing factor to disruption of client relationships, and a barrier to the worker's ability to make active/reasonable efforts.

On a related note, judges perceived that social workers seem to spend limited time with each assigned family, and that this lack of time hampered workers' abilities to work with their clients (e.g., not enough time to arrange visitation for parents, not enough time to make active/reasonable efforts, etc.). Judges wondered whether excessive caseloads and/or excessive clerical responsibilities created this time crunch for workers. One judge wondered whether DFYS had explored the use of paralegals or other support staff to perform routine tasks such as calling the rehabilitation center, arranging visitation, making appointments, etc.

6. MAINTAIN CURRENT CAPACITY IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM BY PROVIDING A STABLE ONGOING SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR EXISTING STAFF AND SERVICES

Explanation: The Commission received information that federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block-grant funds are currently being used to fund the Balloon Project and other front line social workers; and this funding source is not sustainable. Equally important, the Commission should make it clear that the additional improvements embodied in the Commission's recommendations cannot come at the expense of existing priorities, e.g., we should not reduce our response rate to reports of harm or reduce our efforts at moving kids into permanent placements in order to increase the frequency of home visits by social workers.

Address declining TANF Block Grant Revenue: Based upon staff testimony, these dollars are unlikely to be available in future years. It is imperative that child related programs (Headstart, CDVSA, Ballon Project, etc.) not suffer a reduction from current levels of support. While there is much to be done, the first order of business is to not "backslide" from current efforts.

The amount is in question, but, appears to approximate \$12.5 million. A fund source switch to general funds should be requested in FY04.

7. CONTINUE BALLOON PROJECT

[Improving Placement Stability]

Continue Balloon Project, making it an ongoing program, to assure children do not stay longer in custody than needed.

PROVIDE ON-GOING FUNDING FOR THE "BALLOON PROJECT" AND MOVE CHILDREN INTO PERMANENT HOMES WITHIN A REASONABLE TIME FRAME.

Comments: No child should remain in foster care longer than is absolutely necessary.

Balloon Project Funding continued

8. FULLY FUND THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR THE DIVISION OF FAMILY AND YOUTH SERVICES

Explanation: The Commission heard extensive testimony on the need for a new management information system. The Division has received substantial funding to begin development of the new system; but additional funding will be required for implementation.

Finish implementation of ORCA – client data and management information system for DFYS. In addition to improving safety for children, ORCA promises to streamline business practices for workers to concentrate more on seeing every child in custody and responding to all children with reports of harm.

Review the development and implementation of ORCA to determine if the new MIS can be brought up in stages (modules) to get some of the benefits into the information tracking that DFYS must do sooner than 2004.

Implement Online Resources for Children of Alaska (ORCA): Full implementation and funding for ORCA is crucial to managing and improving the delivery of child protection related services. As noted by DFYS staff (and Legislative Audit), the current system is not only error prone; it does not allow for effective case management, tracking or program efficiencies. Sufficient funding should also be available for staff training.

It is virtually impossible to address a problem without accurate data. Having confidence in knowing where we are is critical in developing a strategy (services, funding, procedures, etc.) for where we should be.

Create and maintain a data system that documents the accomplishments of social workers, so that they realize what they get done, and others can easily be made aware of their hard work also.

Data collection/analysis personnel
ORCA development of the data system - \$1.8 million

9. ELIMINATE THE GAP IN SERVICES CAUSED BY THE TRANSFER OF CASES FROM INTAKE AND ONGOING PERMANENCY UNITS and/or THE TURNOVER OF CASEWORKERS.

- The transfer of cases from the intake unit after the probable cause hearing to the ongoing permanency unit frequently results in a lack of services at a critical time in a child protection case. Clients often receive a case plan without participating in its development and then are turned over to another social worker who is often unavailable at the first case meeting with all the parties. This practice is frustrating for the client and results in a costly expenditure of resources and time in a system plagued by high caseloads and limited resources.
- Implementation of visitation and services are often delayed or interrupted by the transfer of cases and gaps in staffing.

IMPROVE TRANSITION PROCESS BETWEEN INVESTIGATION AND ONGOING SOCIAL WORKER (ANCHORAGE)

- * W/in 7 days of P.C. have face to face meeting between investigation & ongoing SW. To do:
 1. Set meeting for new SW with family
 2. Establish immediate to do list
 3. Get meeting/court dates in new SW's calendar

I note that the practice in Anchorage of transferring a case from an intake to an on-going social worker also was identified in the Alaska Judicial Council's 1996 assessment (*Improving the Court Process for Alaska's Children in Need of Aid*) as a major cause of case delay (page 90). The Judicial Council recommended that "DFYS should consider whether confusion and delays caused by separating the intake and ongoing functions balance the benefits gained by making the distinction." (page 178).

10. REDUCTION OF MULTIPLE PLACEMENTS FOR CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE

- More emphasis needs to be placed on the early identification of relative foster placements through the utilization of social histories and/or collaboration with ICWA workers if children are unable to be maintained in their home.
- Children need stability. Children with FAS/FAE, who unfortunately make up a significant portion of children in out of home placement, need consistency at home and at school and do best in an environment with few changes. A child with FAE who experiences cognitive challenges can quickly suffer from other secondary issues, (i.e. mental health, delinquency, substance abuse etc.).
 - * Early and thorough relative searches
 - * Early notification to Tribes
 - * Early record of social history

FRONTLOAD CASES/REDUCE NUMBER OF PLACEMENT CHANGES

- * Early and thorough relative searches
- * Early notification to Tribes
- * Establish paternity as soon as possible
- * Complete social history early
- * Implement concurrent planning
- * Eliminate emergency foster care system (Anch.)

Establishment of Paternity

* There is inconsistency when the identity of the father has not been established. DFYS often does not follow its own policies and procedures for determining the identity of a father. DFYS should follow its own policies and procedures to the letter.

DFYS should obtain the child's birth certificate, and if a father is not named, DFYS should do an adequate inquiry early in the case to attempt to determine the father's identity. DFYS policies state that all putative fathers should be paternity tested. Instead, DFYS sometimes chooses which of the potential fathers to test, and refuses to test all of them. If a possible father is named and paternity testing is appropriate, DFYS should get that process going as soon as possible. If the paternity test comes back negative, DFYS should re-contact the mother and inquire further about who could be the father. If a mother refuses to cooperate, DFYS should request the assistance of the Attorney General's office to summons the mother into court and allow the court and the parties to inquire of the mother. Only once all possibilities of identifying a father have been exhausted should notice by publication on the unknown father be requested.

[Assuring Continued Safety]

11. Support special program or project aimed at lowering Alaska's repeat maltreatment rate. Testimony, Federal Review, stakeholder interviews, and information provided by the Statewide Assessment suggests that maltreatment most often involves neglect cases and Alaska Native children. A targeted effort with the Tribes and tribal organizations ought to focus on preventing this type of maltreatment.

INCREASE MONITORING AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO AVOID
ASSUMPTION OF CUSTODY AND PREVENT RECURRENCE OF
MALTREATMENT

- * Expand Mat-Su program (referral of priority 3 reports for investigation, service provision, and follow-up)
- * After investigation complete in pre-custody case
give follow-up to contractor to assist with referrals/track compliance
- Re-examine the current low priority of neglect cases given current research on child development

12. IMPLEMENT AN INDEPENDENT AUDIT OR STUDY THAT
OBJECTIVELY EXAMINES THE MAJOR PROBLEMS IN THE
ADMINISTRATION OF DFYS AND THE DELIVERY OF CHILD
PROTECTION SERVICES.

- A through examination needs to be conducted to determine the causes and solutions to the problems of :
 - staff turnover;
 - delays in the transfer of cases from one worker to another;
 - delays and gaps in services for children and families;
 - multiple out of home placements; and the
 - high rate of recurrence of maltreatment of children
- Develop and implement immediately a plan to focus on the reassignment of administrative and supervisory personal to provide direct services to children and families.

13. PROVIDE FUNDING FOR PARAPROFESSIONAL IN-HOME SUPERVISION, EDUCATION AND INTERVENTION OF PARENTING SKILLS WHENEVER IT IS POSSIBLE TO PREVENT REMOVAL OF A CHILD FROM THE HOME. THIS WOULD BE PARTICULARLY RECOMMENDED IN THE CASE OF NEWBORN BABIES, AFFORDING THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO FORM AN EARLY MOTHER-INFANT ATTACHMENT BOND.

Comments: Attachment in the earliest stages is of critical importance to the health and well-being of mother and baby. If the case plan includes reunification, provide the necessary oversight to assure safe parenting practices during the early months following birth. This is an appropriate role for trained paraprofessionals.

14. PROVIDE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR PARENT EDUCATION CLASSES (FOR FAMILIES WHOSE CHILDREN ARE IN CUSTODY, OR FAMILIES WHO HAVE BEEN REFERRED FOR SERVICES) THAT INCLUDE HOME VISITATION SERVICES TO FACILITATE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF LEARNED SKILLS IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT.

Comments: Research supports the fact that education does not = behavior change. Many families need on-going information and support in order to raise healthy children in non-violent environments. For many families involved with DFYS, the changes encompass every facet of their life... residence, friends, income, work, recreation, child care, education, etc. The performance expectations are overwhelming.

Community based parenting program (infant learning model public health)

15. REQUIRE A DIAGNOSIS FOR FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME OR FETAL ALCOHOL EFFECTS FOR CHILDREN REPEATEDLY BREAKING THE LAW

Comment: Too often the reason a child or young person continues to break the law and not learn from his mistakes is overlooked. People with brain injury due to prenatal alcohol exposure are punished for not changing their behaviors. We KNOW they do not learn from their mistakes yet we penalize them. It is time to save these unfortunate people from further victimizing others and being victimized themselves, and to save our state money. We can do this by spending the money on diagnosis and programs to keep effected people out of the criminal justice system. Money spent up front will save the millions of dollars spent trying to rehabilitate people who can't understand what rehabilitation means.

16. WRAP AROUND SERVICES FOR THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES NEED TO BE A PRIORITY.

Comment: When a child enters the child protection system, it is because the family needs help. Services should include the whole family to ensure reunification. Visitations should also occur in places conducive to family healing. DFYS office space often seems to hinder rather than help the family to re-bond.

- Programs are needed to expand the capacity to accommodate the treatment needs of women with children and pregnant women. (*i.e.*, AWRC, Dena A Coy, Fairbanks Program for Women and Children). FAS/FAE is a preventable birth defect and increased efforts must be made to improve the social service delivery and support to women at risk for giving birth to an alcohol-affected child.

17. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSTIC MECHANISM FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN ENTERING THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM THAT ADVOCATES A SEAMLESS INTEGRATION OF SERVICES, A SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY and A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM APPROACH TO PROBLEM SOLVING AND STAFFING CASES THAT GUIDES, SUPPORTS AND MENTORS WORKER DECISION MAKING AND CASE PLANNING.

- Skilled assessment based on informed judgment is critical in the delivery of child protection services. The practice would help avoid crisis driven intervention and a more expensive approach to problem solving.
- On target assessment and diagnosis by skilled practitioners that pinpoint weaknesses can significantly assist in the appropriate identification of resources needed to remedy or ameliorate problems. It can prevent the misuse of valuable resources and prevent harm to the individual.
- Assessments need to include comprehensive social histories that assist in the identification of family resources at the initial stages of a case and provide family placement resources if and when needed.
- Assessments and proper diagnosis can be utilized to assist in the development of individualized and more meaningful case plans.
- Timely access to FAS/FAE diagnostic clinics can permit the development of appropriate treatment plans and case planning. Waitlists for the diagnostic clinics are often several months. Social workers and probation officers need timely information to make treatment and placement decisions sooner rather than latter.
- Collaborative planning needs to occur to continue the work of the diagnostic clinics in the future. The loss of the Providence diagnostic clinic is an unfortunate example of the difficulty in sustaining a critical resource that addresses a problem of gigantic proportions with gigantic fiscal ramifications in this state.
- There needs to be a recognition that the diagnosis of FAS/FAE does not give a complete description of the strengths and areas of need a child or adult may have. A diagnosis of FAS/FAE alone does not necessarily qualify a child for services with DMHDD or Education. A child can cognitively test within normal ranges yet functionally fail to succeed at school or in the community. This can pose problems in accessing special education services under the developmental delay criterion.

- There is a need to clarify or define where children with prenatal exposure to alcohol fit in the education and social service system. Inconsistent definitions and eligibility criteria present access barriers to needed services. DMHDD is not structured to accommodate the needs of prenatally exposed children.
- A multi disciplinary approach to troubleshooting and problem solving is preventative and cost saving. It can draw on a larger, diverse, more creative and culturally relevant approach to problem solving.

18. PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE, IN-STATE, CONTINUUM OF CARE TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF ALL CHILDREN, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE SUBSTANCE ABUSE, SEVERE EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCES AND/OR COGNITIVE DELAYS (i.e. FAS/FAE).

- The emotional and financial cost of sending children to programs outside of Alaska is too high. The state must develop programs in Alaska that meet the needs of children, particularly those experiencing significant mental health issues and cognitive challenges (FAS/FAE).
- Develop and implement a blueprint for the projected “in state services” needed to address the individualized treatment needs of severely emotionally disabled children.
- Special attention needs to be paid to the early diagnosis of FAS/FAE. Research shows that early screening, diagnosis and individualized services reduce the likelihood that affected individuals will develop secondary disabilities associated with FAS and FAE, including mental health problems, problems with employment, school difficulty, involvement with the criminal justice system/incarceration, substance abuse problems and inappropriate sexual behavior. Individuals with FAS frequently have difficulty remembering complex (or even simple) social rules. They have difficulty meeting social expectations since they do not recognize subtle social cues. Poor abstractions and memory skills and strong determination can make them appear stubborn, inflexible, and resistant, especially in situations they perceive as unfair or unjust. These difficulties are often misunderstood and not properly addressed.
- A 1988 Manuel on Adolescents with FAS from the University of Washington reports that adolescents and adults with FAS/FAE have special needs that will have to be addressed by local community agencies. Included are those related to the transition to sexual and physical maturity, and long term planning for sheltered living. Individual with FAS/FAE who have IQ scores of 70-90 often are not

eligible for State and Federally funded programs for developmentally disabled. Their care falls more directly to the local community.

- Recognize that youths who age out of foster care are among the most vulnerable and at risk to repeat the cycle in their own families and develop plans and supports to prevent generational problems. Those youth need transitional plans and special services and supports to help them transition successfully.

PROVIDE FUNDING FOR RESIDENTIAL AND OUT-PATIENT FACILITIES TO TREAT
BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS IN CHILDREN.

Comments: Too many of Alaska's children are sent to residential behavioral treatment facilities in the Lower 48 because Alaska does not have the resources to meet their needs. This is not only costly, but the inevitable separation is adverse to family unity.

[Expanding Service Array]

**19. PURSUE AND EXPAND SPECIAL PROGRAMMING FOR RUNAWAY
YOUTH.**

**20. PROVIDE FUNDING FOR DFYS OVERSIGHT AND TRAINING FOR ALL
STATE-FINANCED RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES FOR CHILDREN.**

Comments: Children in residential facilities have multiple behavioral and mental health problems. Staff need special training specific to children's needs. Representative staff hiring to incorporate traditional childrearing practices.

21. JUDICIAL ISSUES

- a. Specialized courts
- b. Family Group Conferencing

THE ALASKA COURT SYSTEM CONTINUE TO TAKE A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN PROMOTING INTER-AGENCY AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND CROSS DISCIPLINARY EDUCATION AROUND THE ISSUES THAT CHRONICALLY IMPACT THE COMMUNITY AND DRAIN JUDICIAL AND SOCIAL SERVICE RESOURCES. PARTICULAR EMPHASIS SHOULD BE PLACED ON MENTAL HEALTH SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES.

- The court needs to continue to support and expand efforts at modeling appropriate conflict resolution through the use of mediation and family group conferencing in appropriate cases.

- The court needs to continue to support and expand the problem solving therapeutic court model as demonstrated in the Mental Health Court, the Wellness court, the Felony DWI and Drug Court, and the Family CARE Court for CINA cases.
- The court needs to continue and expand training for judges, administrators and court staff around mental health and substance abuse issues. The educational efforts should also include a cross disciplinary approach with individuals and institutions who interact with the judicial system.

Increase the use of mediation and family group conferencing

DFYS Should Implement Previously-Made Recommendations

- TCC recommends that DFYS review the recommendations of the Alaska Judicial Council in Improving the Court Process for Alaska's Children in Need of Aid (1996). There are 85 recommendations; many are relevant only to the court system, but DFYS could adjust its policies or advocate for most of them.

22. Improve the efforts of the courts and DFYS to educate parents on the benefits of having a lawyer representing them in a CINA case. The Commission heard testimony that one of the reasons for delay in permanency resolution is because losing the kids is not real to many parents until the last possible moment and then they request an attorney and the attorney has to request an extension to get up to speed on the case. It has also been my experience that the public defenders provide both advocacy and monitoring of the parents they represent in getting needed services and sticking with them. They also develop a good sense of when a parent is not working seriously on their issues in an attempt at reunification and are not shy about counseling their clients towards termination where appropriate.

23. THE DIVISION SHOULD SEEK TO EXPAND THE EXISTING "DUAL TRACK" PROGRAM WHEREBY FUNDS ARE GRANTED TO COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS TO RESPOND TO LOW-RISK REPORTS OF HARM
Explanation: The Commission received testimony that although the response rate to reports of harm has improved significantly in the past several years, the Division of Family & Youth Services remains unable to respond to some low-risk reports. The Division should seek to expand the role of the Tribes as the provider of "dual track" services in rural Alaska.

ADDITIONAL AND CONTINUED FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS (OUTSIDE OF DFYS) THAT SPECIFICALLY INVESTIGATE PRIORITY 3 REPORTS OF HARM OR NEGLIGENCE, AND HAVE THE ABILITY TO PROVIDE (OR REFER A FAMILY TO) SERVICES THAT WOULD REMEDY THE PROBLEM.

Comment: It is always beneficial to keep families out of a system whenever possible. Education and referral to supportive services that already exist in the community, or minor temporary financial assistance to resolve an impending or present crisis, can be the impetus for family recovery and/or unity. This type of program would benefit from inclusion of a CHILD ADVOCATE who monitored family progress over a 1-3 month period, recommending either case closure or referral to DFYS for child protective services.

24. DFYS NEEDS TO PLAY A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AT BRINGING GOVERNMENTAL, PRIVATE SECTOR, COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL RESOURCES TOGETHER TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS RAISED IN CHILD PROTECTION CASES.

- Clearly no one institution can answer the problems and demands facing the child protection system alone. There must be collaboration with the court, tribes, educators, community leaders, faith based groups, health providers, advocacy groups, treatment providers, mental health clinicians, civic/service groups and individual volunteers.
- The Commission heard testimony on the leadership role the Department has played in the Tribal –State Collaboration and should be commended for this successful effort
- Russ Webb testified in support of the need for better collaborations with other entities that feed into the child protection system.
- Shirley Warner testified about the need for community education and engagement in prevention and is an excellent example of an individual who makes a big difference in her community.
- Governmental entities all need to work together and develop Memoranda of Agreements to provide a seamless integration of services, especially in the areas of mental health, substance abuse and developmental disabilities.

25. Challenge the federal government to modify their requirements that only personnel from the child protection system count when reporting how children are doing when placed in foster care or safe homes.

This recommendation comes from my understanding of the discussion that only the “social worker” can report how a child is doing. This eliminates the public safety officer

in a village, schoolteacher, ministers, or tribal representatives. In the State of Alaska, this is unwarranted. We can rely on village elders, and others, unless the entire village poses a threat to the child, to help in this regard. I am not saying that DFYS or the child protection system will abandon their responsibilities here, but we must find positive ways to share this duty with others. We should not make the task impossible citing "confidentiality" as the first line of defense. This will be a challenging task, but one worth the effort.

26. EXPAND THE EXISTING "HEALTH PASSPORT" PILOT PROJECT IN ANCHORAGE TO SERVE ADDITIONAL CHILDREN

Explanation: The Commission heard testimony that foster parents often do not receive adequate medical histories for their foster children. A foster child's "health passport" completed by a public health nurse stationed in a Division of Family & Youth Services Office can provide foster parents with a complete medical history of their foster child.

27. Involve the parents in the development of the case plan to assure that they take ownership in the plan itself, as well as clearly understand the expectations DFYS has of what they need to accomplish to get their kids back.

28. STREAMLINE BUREAUCRATIC PROCEDURES

- * Implement SNAP procedures
- * Re-engineer TPR/guardianship worksheet process
- * Simplify special funds request process
- * Identify and re-engineer other processes
 - * Ex: Provide SWs directly with bus passes, phone cards, clothing vouchers, etc.

29. ADDITION OF SPECIFIC DFYS STAFF TO ORGANIZE AND CONDUCT REGULAR CASE CONFERENCING WITH ALL THE INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS IN A PARTICULAR CASE AT SET INTERVALS, WHEN A CHILD IS IN DFYS CUSTODY.

Comments: Children are often in foster care for extended periods because of late progress reports, inability to access referrals within a reasonable time frame, absence of shared information which could beneficially impact the case plan; and other factors which delay permanent placement of the child. Case conferencing can be creative. It does not always need to be face to face. Teleconferencing, sharing of reports, releases of confidentiality to all service providers in the case, are just examples of some of the ways we could better serve the best interests of families.

30. Reasonable and Active Efforts

- DFYS hinders its own efforts to help the parents and child. DFYS appropriately and correctly identifies a problem that the parent has or that the child has. But then DFYS often puts nothing in the case plan to deal with the problem. This odd situation happens even in cases where DFYS is attempting reunification. If DFYS wanted to terminate parental rights, it could not argue that it had made reasonable or active efforts at reunification when the agency offered the parent nothing to cure the problem it identified.

31. Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse

* There are many problems with the child protection system when there are allegations of child sexual abuse.

General recommendation: There needs to be better protection of children, better investigation by law enforcement, and more frequent prosecutions.

Sometimes children disclose, only to be returned to the home of the perpetrator. Often there seem to be significant delays between a child's disclosure of child sexual abuse, and an adequate law enforcement investigation and criminal prosecution of the alleged perpetrator. Frequently, law enforcement's investigation of the allegation(s) consists of interviewing the child (sometimes with the perpetrator in the room) and then attempting to obtain a confession from the alleged perpetrator. If the alleged perpetrator does not confess, law enforcement concludes the investigation and there is no prosecution.

Many times children are removed from the home due to allegations of child sexual abuse, but there is no prosecution of the alleged perpetrator. Often there is little to no coordination between the criminal justice system and the child protection system even when the alleged perpetrator is being prosecuted and is being held in jail. Sometimes alleged perpetrators are released on bail without notification to the parties in the child protection case, and sometimes without the criminal court imposing a no contact order between the alleged sex offender and the child. Sometimes DFYS allows an alleged perpetrator to have ongoing contact with the child, and sometimes even supervises such visitation, without first seeking input from the child and all parties in the child protection case as to the appropriateness of such visits, whether the child desires such visits, or the risk of harm to the child.

Specific recommendations

In all cases where there is a substantiated report of child sexual abuse, the following should happen immediately: The child's immediate needs should be met. They should be kept safe. They should have someone to talk to who is well-trained, and be provided

counseling if necessary. If appropriate and the child and/or a parent or other appropriate adult agrees, the child should be examined for physical evidence, preferably at a child advocacy center if available. Pictures should be taken of any physical evidence, and any other physical evidence should be preserved. The results of such exam, and the results of the collection of physical evidence, should be promptly provided to the police and the prosecutor's office. A police report should immediately be sent to the nearest prosecutor's office. A decision as to whether or not to charge the alleged perpetrator should be made as soon as possible by the prosecutor's office. It would be best to arrest the alleged perpetrator and remove him or her from the home, rather than to remove the traumatized child and place him/her with possible strangers, where they may be at risk of further abuse. If the alleged perpetrator cannot be removed and the child victim is instead removed, the presumption should be that all children in the home should be removed. Perhaps the state should then house the children and any non-offending parent together at another location, rather than placing the child(ren) with strangers. If the alleged perpetrator is arrested, all parties in the child protection case, including the child directly, need to be notified before the alleged offender is released from jail or any plea agreement is reached. The judge and all parties in the child protection case should be kept regularly apprised of the status of the criminal case. If the alleged perpetrator is released from jail, whether on bail or because the case is concluded, the presumption should be that a no contact order should be put in place by the criminal court between the alleged offender and the victim, and presumptively all other children in the home, until the child-in-need-of-aid case is fully adjudicated, or the child protection case judge orders otherwise. DFYS should make sure that a risk assessment of the alleged perpetrator is performed by a trained professional, and that the predicted risk of the perpetrator re-offending or committing violence against the family or the public is provided to the criminal court and the child protection court. DFYS needs to inquire of the child and the family about the need and desire for follow-up counseling, or psychiatric or psychological services, and make sure any such needs are met promptly and adequately. DFYS should require the alleged perpetrator to undergo a sex offender evaluation in all such cases.

32. Conditional Relinquishments of Parental Rights

* DFYS should accept conditional relinquishments of parental rights more often than they do. Often a parent cannot or will not control his or her drinking, but remains marginally involved in the child's life. A voluntary relinquishment can go a long way toward resolving a petition to terminate the parent's rights. The conditions can be modest, such as giving the parent a right to visit the child after adoption, but preserving the discretion of the adoptive parents to refuse visitation if the biological parent is intoxicated or begins disrupting the new parent/child relationship.

DFYS should adopt a policy in favor of conditional relinquishments because (1) as an open adoption, they are more consistent with traditional cultural practices, (2) Native children are over represented in the child protection system, (3) the increased likelihood

that petitions to terminate parental rights will settle without trial is a better use of the system's resources, and (4) the increasing practice of terminating parental rights is creating a larger group of "legal orphans" who might benefit from some continued contact with a parent.

The Department should avoid making the parents pay the price for the State's internal policy squabbles. In 1998 and 1999 DFYS offered different terms in its relinquishments, depending on where the parent lived. The difference was based on the venue of the case, not upon the tribal membership of the child. Probably Natives and non-Natives received the same arbitrary treatment. A parent who lived in the 3rd Judicial District was offered a conditional relinquishment. A parent who lived in the 4th Judicial District was denied a conditional relinquishment, but was offered a worthless "Affidavit of Placement Preference." The affidavit has been discontinued. The basic fracas might have been between two units of the Attorney General's Office, but DFYS is the agency with the legal responsibility to the child, and should have done something to stop this arbitrary practice.

33. CHANGE REGULATIONS IN THE PUBLIC SAFETY DOMAIN TO ALLOW STATE TROOPERS ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITY OVER TRIBAL CUSTODY ISSUES.

Comments: This was a request from a Social Worker at Tanana Chiefs Conference who has experienced problems because of this technicality.

State Enforcement of Tribal Court Orders

- * There should be a simple mechanism for Alaska law enforcement to enforce tribal court protection orders, as well as general custody orders as needed.
- * The court system should devise a form specific for filing tribal court orders in state court to obtain assistance from law enforcement.

34. PROVIDE FUNDING FOR AN ICWA WORKER IN EVERY DFYS OFFICE.

Comments: This was a recommendation from workers who have experienced the benefits of collaboration in providing assistance to families.

35. STATE - TRIBAL COLLABORATION ISSUES

Continue state-tribal collaboration processes for delivery of child protection services, i.e. licensing of foster care homes.

Tribal Program Agreements/Funding

Case Plans

- The tribe does not receive a copy of the parents' or child's DFYS case plan until the day of the 6 month review. Tribes are not involved in the case planning process. DFYS should follow its policies and procedures and involve the tribe in case planning, and provide a copy of the case plans to the tribe in a timely manner.

Integration of DFYS and tribal child protection systems

- The prevention, intervention, foster care, therapeutic and supportive services, as well as, licensing, policies and procedures, training, quality assurance, data and management information systems of the Division of Family and Youth Services should be integrated into a broader state/tribal welfare system jointly planned, developed, and maintained by its partner governments.
- Tribal governments should be actively engaged and as equal partners with the state as the Division of Family and Youth Services and other state agencies and state funded child welfare programs plan and initiate needed changes indicated in the current Child Welfare system.
- All child welfare services and systems of the state should be designed for maximum participation, articulation and integration with tribal governments and their child protection infrastructures.

Improvement of DFYS and child protection system compliance with ICWA

Reports of Harm

* Correctly identify the tribe(s) at the report of harm ("ROH") stage. DFYS should be more specific as the Native child's background on the ROH form, naming a tribe if possible, and at minimum, the racial background of the child. (E.g., Athabaskan, Tlingit/Haida, or Yupik). Once the region is identified, DFYS can contact the regional non-profit for that region and identify the child's tribe(s). Then DFYS should contact the tribe(s) and tell them about the report of harm and the status of the investigation.

Contacting the tribe(s) at the ROH stage is required under DFYS' policies and procedures, but is rarely done. DFYS should ask anyone who makes a report of harm, the parents, and anyone they have contact with, at each contact, whether the child is a tribal member or eligible for membership in a tribe, and if so, what tribe. That way, as soon as DFYS files a petition for adjudication of CINA, emergency or otherwise, they should have already inquired whether an ICWA notice is required, and if so, to what tribe(s).

By the time a case is opened, there should be well-established lines of communication between the tribes and DFYS. DFYS should also ask the tribe(s) if the Tribal Court

would like to exercise their jurisdiction and open their own child protection case before the state does so.

Summons, Petition, and ICWA Notice

* The court system should come up with a form summons for child-in-need-of-aid ("CINA") cases that must be served with each petition, is filed with the court, and copied to the parties along with the petition. The summons should include all elements required by 25 USC Sec. 1912(a) of the Indian Child Welfare Act ("ICWA") and by CINA Rule 7. (The summons must contain a statement advising the parties of their right to counsel).

* If the child is a member of an Indian tribe, or if the child is eligible for membership and a parent is a member, the notices required under the Indian Child Welfare Act ("ICWA") (to parents, tribe(s), and any Indian custodians) should be filed and served along with the initial petition for adjudication of a child in need of aid. Such notice should comply with 25 USC 1912(a) of ICWA, and CINA Rule 7(e).

* In each contact DFYS has with a parent, family member of the child, or tribe, DFYS should inquire as to whether the child is a member of or eligible for membership in a tribe. At every court hearing, the court should be encouraged to inquire of all parties as to whether the child is Native, and if the child is a member of or eligible in any tribe not yet provided with an ICWA notice. As it is now, sometimes the tribe of one parent is identified and provided an ICWA notice (albeit several weeks after the start of the case), but often the tribal affiliation of the other parent is unknown. If the other parent is a member of a different tribe, and the child is eligible for membership, that tribe also needs to be provided with ICWA notice as early in the case as possible (ideally also at the beginning of the case, along with the summons and petition).

DFYS is taking too long to serve ICWA Notices. For the period February 1999 to January 2000, in 30 CINA cases, the average time between the child being taken into custody and the ICWA notice being mailed to the tribe was 21 days. If two extreme examples are included in the total, the average time was 44 days. The same delay is probably true today. There is no reason for a delay of more than about 5 business days.

TCC recommends a new ICWA Notice. The first page would identify the parents; identify the prospective tribe or tribes, give the time, date, place, and purpose of the next hearing; and provide a service list for a motion to intervene. The first page would be followed by one or two pages of boilerplate notice advising the tribe of its power to intervene.

Training

* All DFYS personnel should be well-trained regarding the requirements of ICWA, and should be told that it is each employee's duty to abide by those requirements. The ICWA

compliance staff person should be experienced and knowledgeable about ICWA, and should serve as a resource for DFYS staff, and should monitor ICWA compliance on all cases. Whether or not a DFYS employee complies with ICWA should be part of their personnel review. Regular compliance with the law should earn an employee some kind of merit reward, and employees who knowingly refuse to comply with the law should be reprimanded or demoted..

* DFYS needs to advocate for systemic change within its bureaucracy, and within the state court system. This change can, in part, be facilitated by DFYS working in a partnership with the tribes and their legal representatives. (Such as Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc.). There are numerous problems that are being inadequately addressed by DFYS or the court system.

Funding

DFYS funding should be, in part, linked to its compliance with state and federal law.

State custody of child

* Tribes and their legal representatives, if any, (such as TCC) should be notified as soon as a child is taken into state custody, and should be notified of any emergency custody hearing as soon as it is scheduled.

* DFYS should involve the tribe in all placement decisions of their tribal children. This should include, if possible, the initial emergency placement decision.

* DFYS should, at a minimum, provide immediate, written notification to the tribe, their legal representative, the court, and all parties of all changes in placement. Notification of any non-emergency transfer is to be made in advance of the proposed move, pursuant to AS 47.10.080(s). TCC recommends that such notice be provided 10 days in advance. As it is now, the court and the parties often have no idea if a child has been moved. The tribes are often verbally told of a move, but it is often provided after the fact, or just prior to the move, not giving the tribes sufficient time to object to the move and ask for a judicial review by way of a hearing. It is rare for DFYS to provide a tribe's legal representative (such as TCC) written notice about a proposed change in placement, although such notice is required by law.

* DFYS has lost track of children in its care. Fortunately nothing happened to the children, but DFYS had to spend time trying to locate them when alerted to the fact that their whereabouts were no longer known. DFYS should adhere to its own policies and procedures and visit every child in state custody at least monthly. If DFYS is working with a tribe, DFYS should be able to ask the tribal TFYS worker to do the home visit instead of the social worker, if the tribal worker is willing and has the proper training to do so.

* DFYS does not adequately track when the state's custody of a child is expiring. Many times, the state's custody lapses without the state even being aware. DFYS and the Attorney General's office need to get an easy-to-use, reliable tickler/calendaring system such as Outlook Express and use it. DFYS should calendar the expiration of custody 30-60 days before custody will end, and take appropriate action sufficiently in advance of the expiration of custody.

DFYS Should Become Consistent

* DFYS should work cooperatively with tribes in all facets of protection of Native children. This should include DFYS taking a tribe's placement preference seriously, and strictly adhering to the placement preference requirements of ICWA. As it is now, it appears that DFYS uses inconsistent standards in assessing the appropriateness of proposed placements.

* DFYS should strive for consistency in all facets of its work. As it is now, it is nearly impossible to predict whether DFYS will seek temporary custody of a child, not take custody at all, or take custody on a short-term basis (like 24 hours) and then return the child to the home, without ever filing a child-in-need-of-aid case. In some cases where children have been returned home without a CINA case being filed, the child is placed in an at-risk situation, sometimes being returned to the home over and over. In other cases, DFYS takes custody of one child in the home and not the siblings or other children in the home.

Home Studies

* When DFYS decides to do a home study on a potential placement, that request should be made immediately, and the home study should be completed within a reasonable period of time.

If it is not completed within a reasonable period of time, the agency should not be paid for the home study. As it is now, it can be a year or more before the home study is even begun. It is generally 6 months minimum before it is completed. During all of this time, the child is in limbo, while DFYS is merely trying to find an appropriate *potential* placement. This is an unacceptable delay in finding a permanent placement for a child. If DFYS does not have the capacity to do home studies and plans to continue to contract them out to an agency who again contracts them out, this part of the system needs to be fixed. DFYS needs to do the home studies themselves, or there needs to be another agency in a direct contract with DFYS who does them instead. The current practice of having DFYS contact BBNA, who contacts Catholic Social Services, who contacts the Foster Parents Training Center, and all of the agencies and the parties wait around to find out which person or agency is going to do the home study, is cumbersome and time-consuming. Moreover, when DFYS has unreasonably delayed doing a home study, and

the court orders DFYS to do a home study within a fixed period of time, DFYS should comply with the court order. As it is now, at least in Fairbanks, deadlines seem to be almost meaningless to DFYS workers.

DFYS Reports Should be Submitted on Time and Served on all Parties, Including the Tribe(s)

* DFYS needs to comply with federal and state laws and court rules. When a permanency report is due 10 days before the permanency hearing, it should be completed and filed with the court and served on the parties by the requisite deadline. The social worker writing the report should have current, accurate information to report, and the report should contain the information required by law. As it is now, DFYS, at least in the Fairbanks court cases, rarely gets its report done 10 days before the permanency hearing. Instead, often TCC, as a tribe's legal representative, contacts the Attorney General's office and inquires about the report. The assistant attorney general assigned to the case then generally contacts the social worker and instructs them to do the report. Often the report is served several days before the hearing. Often the report either repeats what a previous petition or report said, or otherwise contains outdated, inaccurate, or incomplete information. As a result, permanency hearings are regularly continued to allow the parties the required 10 days to review the report, and/or for DFYS to re-do the report to make it current and complete.

* Likewise, following termination of parental rights, DFYS is required to file quarterly reports, describing progress toward permanency for the child. Often these reports are late or not filed at all. It seems that there is no calendar system for such reports. DFYS must be reminded much of the time to prepare and file a quarterly report. When they are in fact completed, often they are only several lines long, and may contain essentially the same information they did the previous quarter. Often DFYS is still waiting on an adoption home study, or for the adoption paperwork to be completed. Often there is no updated information on how the child is doing in the placement home, but it is merely a report on the status of paperwork. Home study reports or adoption paperwork can take multiple quarters to complete.

* DFYS is often responsible for serving reports, such as predisposition and permanency reports. When the social worker handles service of the report on the other parties, often the tribe is not served. Service on the tribes is more reliable when the report goes first to the Attorney General's Office, which then serves the report.

Transferring to Tribal Court Jurisdiction

- DFYS, in conjunction with the tribes, should set up a process when transferring state CINA cases to tribal court jurisdiction, to emphasize maximum cooperation and continuous protection of the child.

36. FINGERPRINT BASED CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

Review all participants in the child protection system for possible mandatory background checks. Most participants are covered by current law, however, testimony was received that contract employees (i.e. guardians ad litem) may not be.

Criminal Records

- DFYS needs a consistent policy for its response to the criminal record of a parent, foster parent, or adoptive placement. Sometimes the criminal record is a bar to placement, but other times a similar record does not seem to make a difference. It is too hard to predict how DFYS will react when it learns that an adult who is connected to the case has a criminal record.

37. INCREASE PLACEMENT OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN

- * Bring back group homes for teens
- * Create locked treatment facility in Alaska
- * Increase number of therapeutic foster homes
- Pursue tribally licensed foster homes

38. IMPROVE TRANSITION OF YOUTH TO ADULT

- * Fully implement independent living program including assessment, services, placement options
- * Establish volunteer mentor program for teenagers
- * Continue existing youth in transition interagency committee to work on improvements/solutions

See also # 7 above.

39. ASSURE LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL OF LINE-ITEM FUNDING ANNUALLY TO SUPPORT THE ALASKA CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND, ASSURING THAT PROGRAMS AIMED AT THE PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT WILL CONTINUE STATEWIDE.

Comments: Though the ACT fund currently stands at about \$9.5 million, only (the interest) about \$300,000 is available annually for prevention programs. Annual requests for innovative community-initiated programs exceed \$1.5 million. Treatment of family dysfunction as a result of child abuse or neglect is costly, and many outcomes are sadly irreversible. Leaders in many rural communities are just now ready to implement programs that will help them raise their children in healthy, non-violent environments.

40. STATEWIDE EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

The public is not aware of the size of the problem. Child abuse and neglect remains, to many, the "hidden war." The mere size of our incarcerated population, DFYS caseload, court dockets and Trooper investigations tell a far different story. Every opportunity and venue, including our schools, should be utilized to getting the word out.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

1. The citizens of this State, as well as legislators and other decisionmakers, need to know that Alaska has a problem with child abuse and neglect.

2. There should be more community outreach, such as speaking in community forums, to inform influential people about the problems faced by the child protection system and the need for the appropriate level of resources.

41. MAKE LAWS MORE SOCIAL WORK FRIENDLY

1. The legal culture in Alaska's child protection system encourages frequent and sometimes lengthy litigation. The California system is much more efficient and still fair to parents and children. Adjudication is obtained much sooner and easier, so that the parents can then go forth and work on their case plan almost immediately. Delaying adjudication for 120 days or more sometimes causes delayed reunification efforts on both sides.

2. An increase in the amount and intensity of litigation also adds more stress to the entire system. If the laws were easier to work with, more money, time and effort could be spent by all parties on working toward reunification instead of fighting. Thus, there would be a lot less time spent by social workers in court and there would probably be considerably more reunifications than terminations.

42. RE-ESTABLISH THE CHILD CONSULTATION TEAMS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

This was an example of a good prevention project mentioned by Colleen at the Friday meeting. The Municipality initiated it several years ago in an effort to help those schools in Anchorage that did not have a nurse or counselor. Often, when a child was acting out, the full burden fell to the Principal to find a quick solution to the problem. We have the opportunity to look at that model and try to find funding to do again. I will bring whatever documentation I can find to the next meeting showing how the program worked. We would need to get a buy-in from the district to start the program again.

43. SUBSIDIES FOR ADOPTIONS SHOULD NOT AUTOMATICALLY CEASE AT AGE 18 SINCE MANY CHILDREN ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY YOUNGER BY FIVE YEARS OR MORE.

Comment: Many children who have subsidized adoptions, especially those done through the

Balloon Project, are not independent at age 18. Families are now experiencing all funds cut including Medicaid because their developmentally- delayed children are not retarded. Yet these children are still in need of constant supervision. To alleviate this problem adjustment should be made for the developmental age of the child.

Continue to provide subsidies for adoption and guardianship.

APPENDIX D

Summary of Federal Review Final Report
September 19, 2002

Safety Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect. Not in Substantial Conformity – 62%			
Item	Percent Achieved	Strengths	Areas Needing Improvement
Item 1 Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment.	70 %	Priority 1 reports were responded to within timeframes.	<p>Response to some priority 2 and 3 reports were not completed in a timely manner.</p> <p>There is no policy on face-to-face contact with the child. Contact with child was not completed in a timely manner.</p> <p>Not clear whether individuals in local villages used to “assess the situation” are adequately trained to make the necessary safety assessments.</p>

Item 2 Repeat Maltreatment	74%		<p>Rate may be higher because not all incidents of repeat maltreatment are being investigated. (new reports on open case may be delayed or never investigated; reports meet state's criteria for investigation but are screened out (non CPS)).</p> <p>Rate is high due to alcohol-related neglect.</p> <p>Courts view parental alcohol abuse as temporary and therefore unlikely to support a request for custody.</p>
-------------------------------	-----	--	---

Safety Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate. Not in Substantial Conformity – 60%			
Item	Percent Achieved	Strengths	Areas Needing Improvement
Item 3 Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal.	69%	Agency is effective in reducing risk by removing children from their homes and providing services to families.	<p>Agency is not effective in maintaining children safely in their own homes.</p> <p>Services offered to families did not address underlying issues contributing to the maltreatment. Services were inadequate because they did not address key problems.</p> <p>Although services were offered to families, there often was insufficient agency monitoring of services.</p> <p>Recommended services were not provided.</p> <p>Lack of post-reunification services.</p> <p>Workloads prohibit workers from conducting a comprehensive needs assessment and monitoring services.</p> <p>Family support services not accessible to all families.</p>

Item 4 Risk of harm to child	68%	Structured Decision Making will continue to improve decisions related to risk and safety.	Services provided to parents and children were not matched to meet the needs of the family or were insufficient to reduce risk of harm to children, usually due to inadequate assessments. Agency is not consistent in monitoring families to ensure that family members were participating in services, that change was occurring as a result of service participation, and that children continued to be safe.
------------------------------------	-----	---	--

<p>Permanency Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations. Not in Substantial Conformity – 21.7%</p>			
Item 5 Foster care re-entries	86%	Children were not coming back into foster care within 12 months of discharge.	
Item 6 Stability of foster care placement	61%		<p>Placement instability may be attributed to a lack of foster homes, which restricts the ability of workers to match the needs of children to the skills and training of the foster parents.</p> <p>Foster parents not supported by worker lead to foster parents requesting removal of child.</p> <p>Instead of attempting to find relatives or more stable foster homes at the time of removal, children were placed in emergency foster homes or shelters as their initial placements.</p>

<p>Item 7 Permanency goal for child</p>	<p>61%</p>		<p>Key concerns related to maintaining inappropriate and unrealistic goals for long periods of time.</p> <p>Although concurrent goals are being established for children, workers tend to see what happens with one goal before actively working toward the other goal.</p> <p>Compelling reasons not to terminate parents' rights are not always documented or found in the file.</p> <p>Delays in filing TPR due to a lack of services for parents, including long waiting lists for treatment services</p>
<p>Item 8 Reunification, guardianship or permanent placement with relatives</p>	<p>31%</p>	<p>Balloon workers make a difference in moving children to permanency.</p> <p>Guardianship program is a good option for children and is used on a frequent basis.</p>	<p>Primary concern was that DFYS was not providing the parents with the services necessary to bring about the changes required for reunification.</p> <p>Lack of clear goals in the case plans.</p> <p>Failure to provide service to families in a timely manner.</p> <p>Lack of agency follow up on services.</p>

Item 9 Adoption	30%	<p>SNAP</p> <p>Balloon Program</p> <p>Home Study Writing Project</p> <p>Project Succeed</p>	<p>Filing for TPR very late in the case.</p> <p>Delays in the decision process regarding changing goals to adoption; not making decisions in a timely manner.</p> <p>Court delays.</p> <p>Delays in addressing child's medical needs.</p> <p>Delays in searching for relatives as placement resources.</p> <p>Delays in conducting home studies.</p> <p>Difficulties finding families for FAS/FAE children.</p> <p>Lack of sufficient number of adoption specialists to assist workers.</p>
Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement	50%		<p>Services needed to support a successful transition from foster care to independent living were not provided to the child.</p>

<p>Permanency Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children. Not in Substantial Conformity – 65.2%</p>			
Item 11 Proximity of foster care placement	100%	Children were placed in close proximity to parents or close relatives or placement in another community was justified based on the child's needs.	
Item 12 Placement with siblings	90%	Siblings were placed together or the separation was deemed necessary to meet the needs of one or more of the children.	
Item 13 Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	68%	<p>Anchorage's new visitation center.</p> <p>When visits did occur frequently, workers promoted visitation by engaging providers and foster parents, and by providing transportation to support this contact.</p>	<p>Workers' caseloads too high to provide more than one hour of supervised visitation per week.</p> <p>Lack of "family friendly" facilities.</p>
Item 14 Preserving Connections	74%		<p>Tribes not receiving early notices.</p> <p>Not enough diligent efforts to maintain connections to family, community, culture, faith, and friends for children in foster care.</p>
Item 15 Relative Placement	70%	30% of children in foster care are placed with relatives.	<p>Not exploring relatives at all.</p> <p>Not searching for paternal relatives.</p> <p>Conducted limited exploration of potential relatives for placements.</p>

Item 16 Relationship of child in care with parents	81%		Efforts to locate absent fathers are not being consistently implemented throughout the agency and when attempts are made to find fathers, it is more likely to be related to filing TPR than to building or maintaining a relationship with the child.
Well-Being Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs. Not in Substantial Conformity – 28%			
Item 17 Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents	52%		Inadequate assessments resulted in a failure to capture and address underlying problems for both children and parents. Foster parents not receiving services they need. Dual track program not always conducting assessments on an on-going basis.
Item 18 Child and family involvement in case planning	48%		Parents and children were not involved in case planning.
Item 19 Worker visits with child	28%		High caseloads Worker turnover Weather Transportation problems
Item 20 Worker visits with parents	28%		Worker visits not sufficient in majority of in-home cases.

Well-Being Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs. Not in Substantial Conformity – 79.5%			
Item 21 Educational needs of the child.	79%		Key concern pertained to in-home cases in which reviewers determined that DFYS was not responding to children's education-related issues.
Well-Being Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs. Not in Substantial Conformity – 65.2%			
Item 22 Physical Health of the child	77%	Health Passport Program	Lack of health screenings at entry into foster care. Lack of preventive health and dental care. Some foster parents do not view themselves as the ones responsible for providing the children's health screening at the time of placement.
Item 23 Mental Health of the child	66%		Lack of mental health services, particularly culturally relevant mental health services.

Statewide Information System Substantial Conformity			
Item 24 State is operating a Statewide information system that , at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.	Strength	<p>Information on the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for each child in foster care is retrievable from PROBER.</p> <p>Data are available in all offices.</p> <p>Information on reports of harm as well as placement and custody history on children placed in out-of-home care are collected and are accessible.</p> <p>Reports can be generated for local and central offices.</p>	<p>It is difficult to combine data and generate reports.</p> <p>It is necessary to use other data systems such as the provider payment system and the adoption database to fill in information gaps.</p> <p>There are problems with the quality (timing) of the data.</p> <p>PROBER relies on replicated data base technology.</p>

Case Review System Not in Substantial Conformity			
<p>Item 25 Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>Development of a Parent Handbook that outlines CINA process.</p> <p>Administrative review process.</p> <p>SDM</p> <p>Case planning training to all workers during initial TONE training.</p>	<p>Lack of clear goal-oriented case plans.</p> <p>High caseloads impact workers' time with parents in developing case plan.</p> <p>Parents' attorneys sometimes encourage resistance to involvement in case planning.</p> <p>When parents disagree with agency involvement, difficult to involve them in case planning.</p> <p>Lack of clarity in the expectations and format for developing case plans for in-home service cases.</p> <p>Case plans in dual track program are not goal oriented and do not include time limits and the responsibilities of providers.</p>

Item 26 Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.	Strength	Administrative reviews are held regularly with a wide variety of parties participating in the reviews, and the reviews are meaningful.	Invited participants do not always receive notice of the reviews in a timely manner.
---	----------	--	--

<p>Item 27 Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the state has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>Agency convenes permanency-planning conferences after the child has been in foster care for 9 months to prepare for the permanency hearing.</p>	<p>Permanency hearings are not consistently held in a timely manner.</p> <p>Delays in permanency hearings may be caused by continuances requested by one or more parties to permit additional time to prepare for the hearings.</p> <p>Other identified barriers to timeliness of hearings were the scheduling of court dockets, the availability of parties, incorrect tracking from delayed dispositional hearings, and the court practice of granting continuances.</p> <p>Stakeholders noted that courts need to establish more of a balance between parents' rights and children's need for permanency. At present, parents' rights seem to receive greater consideration than children's needs.</p>
<p>Item 28 Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.</p>	<p>Strength</p>	<p>There are procedures for filing TPR, and filings are occurring in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Not consistently documenting compelling reasons not to file for TPR.</p>

<p>Item 29 Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>In the process of hiring administrative clerks to track hearings and issue the notifications.</p>	<p>Foster parents do not consistently receive notification of permanency hearings and are not consistently provided an opportunity to be heard in accordance with ASFA.</p> <p>Notice is not provided very far in advance of the hearing.</p> <p>Administrative reviews are not always in accordance with foster parents' schedules.</p> <p>All parties are not always notified of court hearing changes.</p> <p>Tribes are not regularly notified of reviews.</p>
<p>Quality Assurance Not in Substantial Conformity</p>			
<p>Item 30 The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.</p>	<p>Strength</p>	<p>Extensive policy and procedures manuals exist for CPS and Licensing.</p> <p>When standards are developed, they undergo extensive review by supervisors, providers, external agencies, and the public.</p>	<p>High caseloads create difficulty for workers in meeting practice requirements.</p>

<p>Item 31 The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>Administrative Reviews/Conferences</p> <p>Balloon Project Steering Committee</p> <p>Citizen Review Board</p> <p>Child Fatality Review Team</p> <p>Supervisory Case Reviews</p> <p>Periodic Onsite Reviews</p>	<p>State does not have formal process for clients or stakeholders to evaluate agency performance.</p> <p>State does not have comprehensive quality assurance system.</p>
---	---------------------------------	--	--

Training Substantial Conformity			
<p>Item 32</p> <p>The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.</p>	Strength	<p>State does have an initial training program and workers complete training before being assigned a caseload.</p> <p>Additional training is available on a range of issues and is available in a variety of ways to accommodate both local and distance learning.</p> <p>All training meets competencies established by Child Welfare League of America.</p> <p>Training Academy tracks attendance and provides feedback to management and staff regarding attendance.</p> <p>Attendance is excellent for first six months of employment and new workers complete basic training prior to being assigned a caseload.</p> <p>Training is available to tribal ICWA workers and contract staff.</p>	

<p>Item 33 The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.</p>	<p>Strength</p>	<p>State provides ongoing training to staff who have completed the first year of training.</p> <p>Supervisors are offered an array of courses to enhance skills in supervision and management.</p> <p>Student stipend program located in Anchorage and Fairbanks' offices.</p> <p>Workers and collaborative partners are positive about the quality of the Academy's training.</p>	<p>ICWA Training generally lacks sufficient Tribal involvement.</p> <p>Travel limitations create barriers to accessing training.</p> <p>Workers do not routinely attend ongoing training.</p> <p>High caseloads make attending training difficult for many workers.</p>
--	-----------------	--	---

Report of the Governor's Commission
on Child Protection

October 1, 2002

<p>Item 34 The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>There are specific requirements for both foster and adoptive parents related to training courses that they must attend.</p> <p>Course offerings are widely publicized.</p> <p>Training provided to residential care providers is "strong and relevant."</p>	<p>Foster parents are not consistently receiving initial core training or completing ongoing training, and they routinely provide care for children prior to receiving training.</p> <p>Training is needed regarding special needs children.</p> <p>Foster parent training should be required prior to licensing.</p> <p>Initial training for foster parents focuses on the mechanics and technical aspects of becoming a foster parent rather than preparing them for dealing with children who have experienced maltreatment and may have serious behavioral and emotional problems.</p> <p>There is a lack of training for rural caregivers and an under utilization of training by foster parents.</p> <p>Some foster parents do not perceive the self-study training as effective.</p> <p>There is insufficient emphasize by DFYS on the training requirement.</p> <p>Some foster parents do not receive information on how to access training by mail.</p> <p>Lack of child care is a barrier to participation by some foster parents.</p> <p>About 29 percent (of information collected) of foster homes have no documented training.</p> <p>There is a need for more cultural competency training for foster parents.</p>
---	---------------------------------	--	---

Service Array Not in Substantial Conformity			
<p>Item 35 The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>Services to prevent removal include family preservation, family support services, and day care. Other services are provided through the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, and the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse.</p> <p>Agency has made concerted efforts to develop and provide services designed to achieve permanency for children, including:</p> <p>Balloon Project Home study writing project Project succeed SNAP.</p> <p>Despite the fact that there is an insufficient quantity of service, Alaska has some quality service providers and some quality programs, such as:</p> <p>Child Advocacy Centers Inpatient substance abuse program for mothers and children Tribal services Subsidized guardianship Independent Living Family resource centers AYI Program for children with developmental disabilities</p>	<p>Services are not available in sufficient quantity in either rural or urban communities.</p> <p>Shortages of services have a negative impact on prevention, reunification, permanency planning and the agency's efforts to provide for the well-being of both children and families.</p> <p>Greatest need is for in-home services, substance abuse treatment services, and services for victims of sexual abuse.</p> <p>Tribes need to be involved earlier in the service provision process.</p> <p>There is great need, across the State, for partnering with other agencies to provide services.</p> <p>Visitation resources are inadequate.</p> <p>Transportation is a barrier to accessing services.</p> <p>Follow-up support is needed for families that are reunified.</p> <p>Post-adoption services are needed.</p> <p>Service gaps exist in the following areas: Foster homes, particularly therapeutic foster homes, substance abuse assessment and treatment, mental health assessment and treatment, residential care facilities, respite and day care services, culturally appropriate services in all service areas, home based services.</p>

<p>Item 36 The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>State makes efforts to provide services including flying families out to services, flying specialized service providers to HUB communities, and sending providers (such as behavioral health service specialists) to villages. It is also noted as a strength the arrangements for an extensive network of village-based Tribal workers to provide some services.</p>	<p>There is an array of services available throughout the State, but families cannot always easily access them.</p> <p>Travel to services can be difficult because of long distances and inclement weather.</p> <p>Additional challenges are experienced by clients who receive services away from their home community and have to transition back to the community.</p> <p>Staff and service provider travel to remote areas is costly and time-consuming and requires additional resources.</p> <p>There is a need for more case-specific coordination between the State and tribal workers to ensure follow-through on rural cases, and a need in villages for additional expertise when assessing safety and providing emergency response.</p>
--	---------------------------------	--	---

<p>Item 37 The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>DFYS offices have access to flexible funds to pay for specialized services that may be needed by children or parents or to address individual needs. The local agencies are also able to provide wraparound services, particularly through AYI. Examples are also noted of Tribes using funds to address service gaps.</p>	<p>Service provision is influenced by availability rather than underlying needs of the children and families.</p> <p>There is a lack of unique or individualized services, particularly for in-home cases.</p> <p>There is a need for more coordination of services between agency and the Tribe to ensure that underlying needs are addressed and for services to be more culturally appropriate.</p>
--	---------------------------------	---	--

Agency Responsiveness to the Community Substantial Conformity			
<p>Item 38</p> <p>In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the court, and other public and private child and family serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.</p>	<p>Strength</p>	<p>The State has an active Tribal-State Collaboration group, some positive local collaboration efforts, and managers at all levels of the agency who are seen as easily accessible to community stakeholders when questions or issues arise.</p> <p>Tribal State Collaboration Group has improved Tribal State communication and has resulted in increased joint efforts, including Title IVE agreements and efforts to develop Tribal licensing standards.</p>	<p>Stakeholders report primarily positive relationships.</p> <p>Multidisciplinary teams (MDT) are one of the primary venues for collaboration.</p> <p>Agency is not proactive and seems to respond more to requests for information rather than reaching out to the community.</p>

<p>Item 39 The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>Public notice regarding commenting to the State Plan are issued, and draft copies of the State Plan are sent to all Alaska Tribes.</p>	<p>The Child and Family Services Planning process is limited to review and comment instead of active involvement in setting goals and priorities.</p> <p>Agency is not proactive in getting the community involved in policy development and planning, although the agency is receptive to suggestions from community members.</p>
<p>Item 40 The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.</p>	<p>Strength</p>	<p>State has collaborative efforts among Federal and federally assisted programs.</p> <p>Current efforts are underway to recognize Tribal court adoptions, recognize Tribally licensed foster homes, and to develop strategies to serve more Alaska Native children through the Independent Living program.</p> <p>There is effective coordination efforts on case level in many areas.</p> <p>Federal Court Improvement Project is providing training to judges on child welfare issues.</p>	<p>There is a lack of sufficient contact between ICWA workers and agency workers in one of the sites included in the onsite review.</p> <p>There are difficulties in coordinating services and interventions with local school systems.</p> <p>There is inconsistent coordination with the TANF agency to ensure that conflicting demands are not placed on shared clients.</p>

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention Not in Substantial Conformity			
Item 41 The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child-care institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.	Strength	State has issued and implemented comprehensive licensing standards. Relatives who are licensed meet the same standard as all licensed foster parents.	Licensing process is lengthy and intimidating, and results in discouraging potential foster parenting. Licensing standards do not take into account the culture and child rearing standards of some communities.

<p>Item 42 The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IVE or IVB funds.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>Same standards are being applied to all homes including relative foster homes.</p>	<p>The application of variances results in full licensing standards not being applied to all foster homes.</p> <p>Some variances are being used to waive standards instead of to meet the standards in an alternate way in both relative and non-relative homes.</p> <p>Training requirement is not consistently enforced.</p> <p>Tribal standards for foster homes are not the same as agency standards. DFYS should work more closely with Tribes to ensure high standards are met. ICWA homes are available but Federal and State restrictions exclude very good homes due to licensing and criminal history requirements that cannot be met.</p>
---	---------------------------------	---	--

<p>Item 43 The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.</p>	<p>Strength</p>	<p>Criminal records checks are completed on all homes.</p> <p>APSIN Flag Project assures criminal background checks occur on an ongoing basis by sharing with law enforcement the names of all residents in licensed foster homes. When there is any contact with these individuals due to potential criminal behavior, DFYS is notified immediately.</p>	
--	-----------------	---	--

<p>Item 44 The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.</p>	<p>Area Needing Improvement</p>	<p>Foster a Future – promotes foster parenting through ads on TV and radio.</p> <p>Recognizing Tribally licensed foster homes.</p> <p>Project Succeed</p> <p>Foster Parent appreciation events</p> <p>Youth for Christ – Adopt A Worker program starting in Anchorage.</p>	<p>State needs more recruitment strategies for an effective recruitment plan.</p> <p>State has number of recruiting mechanisms in place, but they do not yield results.</p> <p>There are many Alaska Native children in out-of-preference ICWA placements due to lack of Alaska Native foster homes.</p> <p>Lack of day care in some communities prevents successful recruitment of working adults.</p> <p>Children coming into care have multiple problems and not all families are suitable.</p> <p>Living expenses are high and foster care payments are inadequate to cover costs.</p> <p>Foster parents incur expenses and then must wait to receive payment through the mail.</p> <p>State is losing foster homes either through adoption or by not supporting them with respite and day care.</p> <p>Criminal background checks eliminate some potential families.</p> <p>Some potential families do not follow through because of frustration with the paperwork requirements.</p> <p>Respite care is needed.</p>
--	---------------------------------	--	---

Item 45 The State has in place a process for effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.	Strength	State utilizes the Alaska Adoption Exchange and the Northwest Adoption Exchange to seek placements for children.	
---	----------	--	--